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The Edson - Grande Prairie Trail

Researched by Dave Tewana

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Dave Tewana

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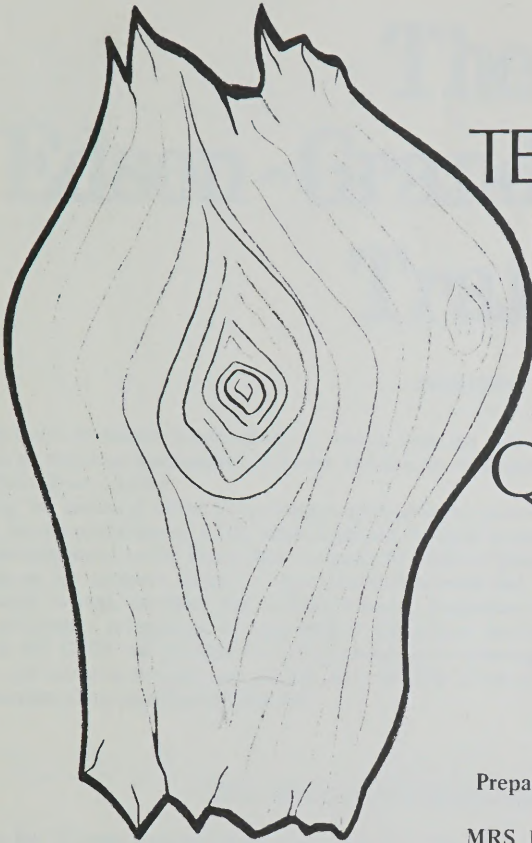
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HARVEY A. SWITZER

HAZE M. WESCOTT

YELLOWHEAD SCHOOL DIVISION NO. 12

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TEACHING NOTES AND SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Prepared by

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The Edson - Grande Prairie Trail

OVERVIEW

This Grade IV historical unit selects its content from the time when the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway decided to establish its divisional headquarters at Edson. It traces the development and decline of the Edson Trail as a main artery to the Peace River country.

Using the historical method the student investigates the growth of Edson between 1910 and 1915. He considers reasons for the establishment of the Edson Trail and evaluates its successes and failures, as well as examining the Trail's effect on settlement in the Peace River country. Problems of geography, economics and sociology are stressed with emphasis on the pioneer's ability to cope with the successes and failures of everyday life. The student is given the opportunity to read, interpret, and evaluate historical documents including photographs, book excerpts, letters, and tapes. Although it is expected that the student will acquire considerable knowledge about the Edson-Peace River region of the 1910's, the process of acquiring knowledge is to be emphasized. The students should have opportunity to analyse and interpret the past and present with the help of his own and other frames of reference and to arrive at generalizations about historical phenomena.

TEACHING NOTES AND SAMPLE QUESTIONS

This kit of prime documents and photographs on the Edson-Grande Prairie Trail is intended to supply sample questions and activities. Photographs are used as the nucleus of the unit. It is believed that the photographs should serve at least a two-fold purpose. Firstly, since the reading of photographs is an acquired skill, the photographs should be used to develop photo-reading skills, and during this process the student will discover a good deal of our early pioneer history. Secondly, the photos should be used as any good prime document, i.e., to supply information in the student's investigation of a question that is of importance to him.

As with any teaching aid, the effectiveness of the photos and documents depends upon how the teacher utilizes the material. It is up to each teacher to use his or her own creative ability to add, change, or omit any material or suggestions that do not meet with a particular classroom situation. Classroom discussions are perhaps more important in this type of situation than detailed notes given to the class by the teacher. Wherever possible, children should be encouraged to speculate and make their own generalizations and hypotheses.

It is strongly suggested that an inquiry approach be used. In learning through inquiry, a student is presented with data and confronted with a problem. He must then provide his own solution in a systematic way, working through several phases of problem solving.

1. Orientation — student discovers the problem.
2. Hypothesis formation — an hypothesis is a statement which attempts to explain a problem and therefore may channel the investigation in a given direction.
3. Data collection — at this stage the students search for all relevant data — pro or con.
4. Conclusion — hypothesis is evaluated, it may be accepted; if not, it is rejected or further qualified.
5. Generalization — an open-ended statement of relationship.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PICTURES IN TEACHING

Since the sixteenth century, educational reformers have been trying to overcome the weaknesses of verbalism in teaching – the use of words without understanding of their meanings. Sense realists insisted that the order of learning must be things, thoughts and words. Comenius emphasised that words and pictures must be made to react favorably in order to facilitate learning. Pictures should not be considered as a substitute for words in the teaching of history but a positive encouragement to work with words.

The fact is that our primary world is a world of verbalism. The words help us to see the relationship among different objects, but “out of sight is out of mind”. Therefore, the teacher must continuously make efforts to translate from visual into verbal and verbal into visual. Pictures help to convey information, understanding and internalization of the content.

A good picture should have the following qualities:

- the evidence of human activities
- activities should be related to the human environment
- show landscape and vegetational details
- show variety of cultural landscape.

The teacher should use pictures to set the memory cues and to develop mental skills of the students. The student must be an active participant in acquiring knowledge and insight.

OBJECTIVES

Although the writers of this unit believe that the following objectives are important ones to be considered in the teaching of this unit, the objectives as given are suggestive and are not in any way complete. Values and skill objectives should receive top priority. Listed content objectives are deliberately few in number because we believe students and teachers should be given the freedom to develop the content in the way they find most relevant.

Values

1. To develop a sense of cooperation by participating with other students in classroom activities.
2. To develop a sense of dignity by accepting and learning responsibility and respect for the rights of others.
3. To critically and objectively examine a variety of views and arrive at his own opinions.
4. To develop a sense of loyalty to the social structure through group interaction.
5. By studying prime documents the student should develop an appreciation for the contributions made by pioneers to our society.
6. To evaluate a man's worth in a pioneer settlement.

Skill

1. To be able to establish a dialogue with each type of document and to list one basic conclusion from activities these documents show.
2. To be able to develop hypotheses from primary and secondary documents.
3. Using an hypothesis as a starting point, the student should be able to search for conclusive evidence to support or reject his hypothesis.
4. To be able to assess the degree to which documents are accurate by using photographic evidence.
5. To be able to report in writing the results of the process of synthesizing information from documents.

Content

1. The student will be able to state verbally in discussion with the teacher the following major conclusions:
 - a. Edson was the gateway to the Peace River settlement.
 - b. The town of Dunvegan grew because of the Edson Trail.
 - c. Man is not completely controlled by the natural features but is able to shape them to meet his activities.
2. The student will develop new vocabulary from use of the documents.

THE EDSON—GRANDE PRAIRIE TRAIL (P-1)

This rustic sign on highway 16, west of Edson, pays tribute to the first major trail of settlers into the Peace River country. After the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway reached Edson in 1910, a trail was cut through 200 miles of wilderness to Sturgeon Lake and on to Grande Prairie. Hundreds of pioneers followed this route until the completion of the Northern Railway in 1916. The Edson Trail skirted the Swan Hills, followed the Little Smoky River, Tony River, and finally swung to the northwest to reach Grande Prairie, the dream of the settlers.

Sample Questions

1. What is written in this picture?
2. What is the difference between a railway and a trail?
3. Why do you think the Edson—Grande Prairie Trail was used so much before 1916?

Suggested Activities

1. Investigate the present day condition and use of the Edson-Grande Prairie Trail.
2. Using a modern road map, locate Edson and Grande Prairie. How would you travel between the two points today?

MAP: THE EDSON—GRANDE PRAIRIE TRAIL (M-1)

Sample Questions

1. What does the title of this map indicate?
2. Locate Edson on this map.
3. Locate the Little Smoky River.
4. Locate Sturgeon Lake.
5. Locate Grande Prairie.
6. What sign represents old trails on the map?
7. Show the Trail on this map from Edson to Grande Prairie.

Suggested Activities

1. Visit the site and walk a distance along the Old Edson Trail.
2. On a sketch map locate the places such as Little Smoky River, Tony River, Valleyview, Sturgeon Lake, and Grande Prairie. Join these places showing the Edson Trail.
3. Make a model of the Edson-Grande Prairie Trail.

Suggested Teacher Readings

1. A.M. McQuarrie, "Building the Edson Trail," *Alberta Historical Review*, Autumn, 1966, (D-1).

GATEWAY: GRANDE PRAIRIE—PEACE RIVER DISTRICT (P-2)

In 1911, The Department of Interior carried out a campaign to induce settlement in the Peace River country. Extensive advertising was done through trade boards, and colonization agents in central and northern United States and also in the old populated parts of Canada. After the arrival of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway in Edson in 1911, which surveyed a branch line from Edson to Grande Prairie, Edson was advertised as the “Gateway to the Last Great West”.

Sample Questions

1. What is the name of this gate?
2. When was this gate built?
3. Why was it named as a Gateway — Grande Prairie-Peace River District?
4. What is written at the bottom of this picture?
5. From where do you think these people came?
6. On what are they travelling?
7. How many horses are pulling the stage?

Suggested Activities

1. Make a model gate for your classroom.
2. Give a suitable name to the gate.
3. Show the flags of the immigrants on the gate.
4. Letter to the Editor, *The Western Leader*, Edson, Alberta, Thursday, February 19, 1914, by H. Bingham. The letter may be read to the students to arouse their interest in the study of Edson Trail.
5. Develop a timeline.

Suggested Teacher Readings

1. *The Western Leader*, May 29, 1915, “A Railway From Edson Down The McLeod Valley”, (D-11).
2. H.A. Switzer, “Edson—Grande Prairie Trail,” *Alberta Historical Review*, Summer, 1960, (D-3).

HOMESEEEKERS WITH LOADED WAGONS AT EDSON (NA-1679-1), (P-3)

The people of Edson also advertised Edson as “the true Gateway to the Peace River country” in newspapers in Canada and United States. They thought it would be a good business for Edson. The advertisements such as “Go by Edson”, and “Get your supplies in Edson as you go” attracted the homeseekers. The homesteaders were passing through Edson with their loaded wagons and heading towards Grande Prairie even though the trail was not cut through.

Sample Questions

1. What is written in this picture?
2. What do you think that building with a flag could be?
3. What were their main sources of transportation and communication?
4. What are they carrying in the wagons?
5. Why do you think it was common for settlers to travel in groups?
6. Why do you think the homeseekers might be moving?

Suggested Activities

1. Draw a scene of early homeseekers.
2. Build a story on the lives of homeseekers.

Suggested Teacher Readings

1. Text of a radio broadcast by Tony Cashman over CJCA, as part of his series “The Edmonton Story”, September, 1959, (D-7).
2. News item in *The Albertan*, “Settlers Face Food Shortage”, September 29, 1911, (D-12).

FIRST STAGE COACH ON THE EDSON TO GRANDE PRAIRIE STAGE LINE (NA-515-15), (P-4)

Edson, being the “Gateway” to the Peace River country, some enterprising people (one of them, John Lowe) opened up a stage line from Edson to Grande Prairie in 1911. In Lowe’s words, “It took five drivers eight days to travel from Edson to Grande Prairie”. The Edson Trail was nothing but full of bad spots, river crossings, muddy ruts, muskeg, and the bottomless sink-holes. The driver usually asked the passengers to alight and stretch their legs over the bad spots ahead. The passengers usually ended up walking, or swimming, most of their journey according to the road situations. The driver often kept a bottle of rum to keep himself and the passengers warm in case of sickness. A one-way fare from Edson to Grande Prairie was \$26 with a round trip costing \$50.

Sample Questions

1. What form of transportation is shown in this picture?
2. What is the difference between a stage and a wagon?
3. How many passengers are sitting on the stage coach?
4. Why did the passengers travel by stage coach?
5. Why do you think the passengers were not allowed to take more than 20 pounds of luggage?
6. Why do you think the front wheels are smaller than the back wheels of the stage?
7. Would this stage coach be carrying anything other than passengers?
8. Can you think of any reason why the stage is pulled by several horses?

Suggested Activities

1. The fare from Edson to Grande Prairie one way by stage was \$26. Compare that fare with rail and bus fare as well as automobile costs for the same trip today.
2. Compare time factors and such things as passenger comforts in 1911 with today.

Suggested Teacher Readings

1. Philip Godsell, *Romance of the Alaska Highway*, The Ryerson Press, Toronto, 1944, pp. 7-15.
2. An article by Ken Liddell, *The Calgary Herald*, August 29, 1958, (D-13).
3. An advertisement by C & R Stage, “Between Edson and Grande Prairie City”, April, 1914, (D-5).

BULL TRAIN ON TRAIL TO GRANDE PRAIRIE (NA-334-11), (P-5)

Oxen were used on this trail because they endured the heartbreak of mud holes better than horses. The bull trains carried most of the freight on the Edson—Grande Prairie Trail. Usually there were three to six of the units making a train. On an average day, bull trains travelled 20 miles. It usually took 15 days to travel from Edson to Grande Prairie, but sometimes due to bad weather and bad luck it took three months.

Sample Questions

1. How many wagons make up the bull train?
2. What was used to pull the wagons?
3. Why were oxen used instead of horses for pulling the wagons?
4. What goods were hauled by bull trains?
5. When and why did stage coaches, wagons, and bull trains disappear?
6. Why do you think there is a horse in the picture?

Suggested Activities

1. Different groups of students could work on such topics as loading the wagons, camping at night, travelling on the road, crossing the river, arriving at Edson, leaving for Grande Prairie, and travelling by coach.
2. Finding the meanings of such words as freight, yoking, bullwhacker, dunnage, and leaders to wheelers.
3. Compare the length of time it would take to send freight from Edson to Grande Prairie in 1911 and today.

OX TEAM AND SLEIGH LEAVING EDSON TO GRANDE PRAIRIE (NA-283-1), (P-5A)

The writer, H.A. Switzer, of “On the Edson–Grande Prairie Trail”, *Alberta Historical Review*, Summer, 1960, gives an excellent account of an ox sleigh which he and his partners used on the Edson–Grande Prairie Trail. This was the first outfit to leave for Grande Prairie. It contained baled hay and grain for the oxen and food supplies, first-aid medicine, provisions, and tents for themselves. The travelling by ox team sleigh was very slow and usually averaged about 20 miles a day. Each night they cooked their own meals, fed the oxen, cut spruce boughs to make a bed at the rear end of the sleigh, and set up a tent to sleep.

Sample Questions

1. In what season was this picture taken?
2. What articles are they carrying on their sleigh?
3. Identify the features in the background of this picture.
4. What would be the reason for the dog?
5. Why was the sleigh not used during the summer?

Suggested Activities

1. Compare this photo with the photo showing the bull train.(P-5)
2. Ask the students to bring their own sleighs during winter to see how they were used as a means of transportation in early days and now as a sport.
3. Use Mr. H.A. Switzer as a resource person and invite him to the classroom, or make a taped interview.
4. Examine the picture to see if one of these men is still living in Edson. What is his name? What business does he own in Edson?

Suggested Teacher Readings

1. H.A. Switzer, “Edson–Grande Prairie Trail”, *Alberta Historical Review*, Summer, 1960.

SETTLERS ON EDSON—GRANDE PRAIRIE TRAIL TWO SLEIGH LOADS (NA-1328-2817), (P-6)

The effective advertisement campaign carried out by the people of Edson and the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway to build a branch line to Grande Prairie brought many settlers from the eastern part of Canada and northern and western parts of the United States to Edson. The settlers came even before the trail was cut through. They travelled on bumpy, muddy muskeg, and bushy trail with their families and domestic animals. It took most families two to three weeks to get through from Edson. Many settlers set out with things like pianos in the kit. However, most of the bulky things had to be left along the trail but as Mr. McQuarrie recalls, "Nothing was ever looted". Due to frequent delays such as bad weather and allowing the animals to feed and rest, it usually took three months to travel from Edson to Grande Prairie.

Sample Questions

1. How many people are in this picture?
2. Why is the chimney coming out of the sleigh covering?
3. Why do you think they are taking a cow with them?
4. Guess what they might be carrying in their sleigh.
5. Why do you think this sleigh is pulled by horses instead of bulls?
6. Describe the clothing of the women.

Suggested Activities

1. Compare the dress of these people to modern-day dress.
2. What similarities and differences do you see in this picture and picture number, NA-283-1, (P-5A)?

Suggested Teacher Readings

1. A Letter to the Editor in *The Albertan*, "Settlers Face Food Shortage", September, 1911, (D-12).
2. An article in *The Edmonton Journal*, "On The Trail Through the Peace River Country", October 7, 1911, (D-9).
3. Beatrice Clink, "Hell Bent . . . For the 'Peace'", *Farm and Ranch Review*, May, 1958. These readings will provide excellent background and knowledge to the teacher about the problems of the Grande Prairie settlers. (D-8).

ROAD CAMP ON GRANDE PRAIRIE TRAIL (NA-449-5), (P-7)

McQuarrie in his article, “Building the Edson Trail”, *Alberta Historical Review*, Summer, 1966, gives an excellent account of the road camps on the Edson Trail. These camps were built to make the road passable for settlers to go to Grande Prairie. These camps were set up by the provincial government for building ferries, bridges, and improving the trail for work crews. The author of this article was responsible for cutting a passable road through the bush from Edson to Sturgeon Lake.

Sample Questions

1. How many men are in this picture?
2. What do you think these men are holding in their hands?
3. What type of vegetation do you see in this picture?
4. Where would the camp get its water supply?
5. What other necessities are needed for such a camp?

Suggested Activities

1. Find out why these government camps were on the Edson–Grande Prairie Trail. See (D-1).

Suggested Teacher Readings

1. A.H. McQuarrie, “Building of the Edson Trail”, *Alberta Historical Review*, Summer, 1966, (D-1).

**STOPPING PLACES LITTLE SMOKY AND TONY RIVER
ON THE EDSON—GRANDE PRAIRIE TRAIL
(NA-649-13 and NA-1328-2831), (P-8 and P-9)**

In order to provide facilities for settlers along the Edson Trail, a number of stopping houses were built. After leaving Edson, the travellers had to travel 20 miles before they could find a bunkhouse to stay. Usually the stopping places — perhaps a bunkhouse and a barn of logs — took their names from the miles from Edson — Twenty Mile, Thirty-five Mile, Forty-seven Mile Stop, and so on. At Little Smoky River and Tony River stopping places, better accommodation was provided for the settlers and hay for the beasts. These stopping places were usually situated near a stream to assure a water supply. The owner supplied a fairly large room furnished with a cook stove, a table and a few benches. Between the stopping places the settlers battled cold in winter, black flies and mosquitoes in summer.

Sample Questions

1. Examine the picture carefully and describe what man-made features you see in it.
2. For what purpose was this building used on the Edson—Grande Prairie Trail?
3. Why do you think the settlers stopped on their way to Grande Prairie?
4. Why do you think the stopping places were usually near the rivers?
5. How far is Little Smoky River from Edson?
6. How far is Tony River stopping place from Little Smoky River stopping place?

Suggested Activities

1. Trace the Edson—Grande Prairie Trail on the sketch map.
2. Compare the accommodation facilities provided for settlers on the Edson—Grande Prairie Trail with the accommodation facilities for travellers today.
3. Locate Little Smoky River and Tony River. Visit the Lions Park in Edson and show the different kinds of log cabins.
4. Build a small log cabin.

MAIL HORSES EDSON TO GRANDE PRAIRIE (NA-1679-7), (P-10)

The volume of mail was proof of how many hundreds of people were going through the Edson Trail. In the spring of 1911, the mail carrier had only one letter but in the fall he was hauling the mail with a horse team. The mail was carried from Edson to Grande Prairie over this trail by horseback and stage coach from 1911 to 1915. When, in July 1911, the first mail carrier left for Grande Prairie, the people of Edson celebrated the occasion and saluted the expansion of the Peace River country. From Historical Notes supplied by Mrs. Walter Roberts, Grande Prairie, July, 1955 — "Mrs. Roberts, who assisted her brother, Jack (Patterson), in the post office, remembers that A.H. McQuarrie came into the store one day in the fall of 1911 and handed her a packet of mail, the first to come over the Edson Trail". Before the railway arrived in Grande Prairie, mail came over the Edson Trail once a week. Jack Patterson opened the first post office in Grande Prairie in a caboose.

Sample Questions

1. What do you think these horses are carrying?
2. How was the mail carried from Edson to Grande Prairie?

Suggested Activities

1. Visit the post office to get more information about mail carrying.
2. Use a postman as a resource person in the classroom.
3. Investigate other methods of communication, i.e., telephone, pony express, etc.

A PACK OUTFIT LEAVING EDSON FOR GRANDE PRAIRIE (NA-334-8), (P-11)

The early pioneers travelling via Edson shipped their goods and stock by train from Edmonton to Edson. From Edson they used horses or oxen for the overland journey. The long trains of pack horses passed over the Edson- Grande Prairie Trail. The bunkhouses and huge log barns were spaced about a day's journey apart along the Edson Trail. These stopping places were built close to a river or a creek in order to assure a supply of water. The best way to travel over the Edson-Grande Prairie Trail was on horseback. The settlers found it very difficult to make their way in heavily loaded wagons because of the dangerous sections of the trail such as break-neck hills, lack of bridges, poor ferry system, and mud holes.

Sample Questions

1. How many horses do you see in this picture?
2. What do you think these pack horses are carrying?
3. Why is there luggage on the horses?
4. Compare this picture with the picture of mail horses.
5. Can you think what would be the season when this picture was taken?

Suggested Activities

1. Find other uses of horses on the Edson-Grande Prairie Trail.
2. Find how the arrival of the railroad affected the other means of transportation and communication.

How to Obtain Materials

All photographs may be ordered by number. Photographs with numbers starting with the letters NA or NC may be ordered from: **Glenbow Historical Library and Archives, 902 – 11th Avenue SW, Calgary, Alberta.**

A taped interview by Mr. Dave Tewana with Mr. Harvey A. Switzer may be obtained by sending an empty tape to: **Yellowhead Regional Social Studies Council, c/o Yellowhead School Division No. 12, Box 1570, Edson, Alberta.**

Additional pictures available from Glenbow are:

1. Homesteaders Having Meal on Edson—Grande Prairie Trail (NA-1328-2832)
2. Pioneers on Edson Trail (NA-488-4)
3. Sleigh Loads on Edson Trail, Peace River (NA-1440-3)
4. Settler on Trail in Grande Prairie Area (NA-487-1), (P-14)
5. Man and Dog Packing—Edson—Grande Prairie Trail (NC-6-704), (P-15)
6. Settlers on the Edson—Grande Prairie Trail (NA-515-17), (P-16)
7. Bull Team setting out for Grande Prairie from Edson (NA-461-8), (P-13)
8. A Cree Indian Family on the Edson Trail (NA-283-8), (P-12)

With the prime documents included in this kit is a list of source material entitled "Suggested Readings for Teachers and Students" that may be used to supply the data needed to complete the suggested activities.

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SUGGESTED READINGS FOR TEACHER AND STUDENTS

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 2. *Alberta Historical Review*, Summer, 1960, pp. 1-8.
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 9. Godsell, Philip, *Romance of the Alaska Highway*, The Ryerson Press, Toronto, 1944, p.7.
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 11. "Interesting Facts About Grande Prairie", Grande Prairie, *The Herald*, 1930, p. 40.
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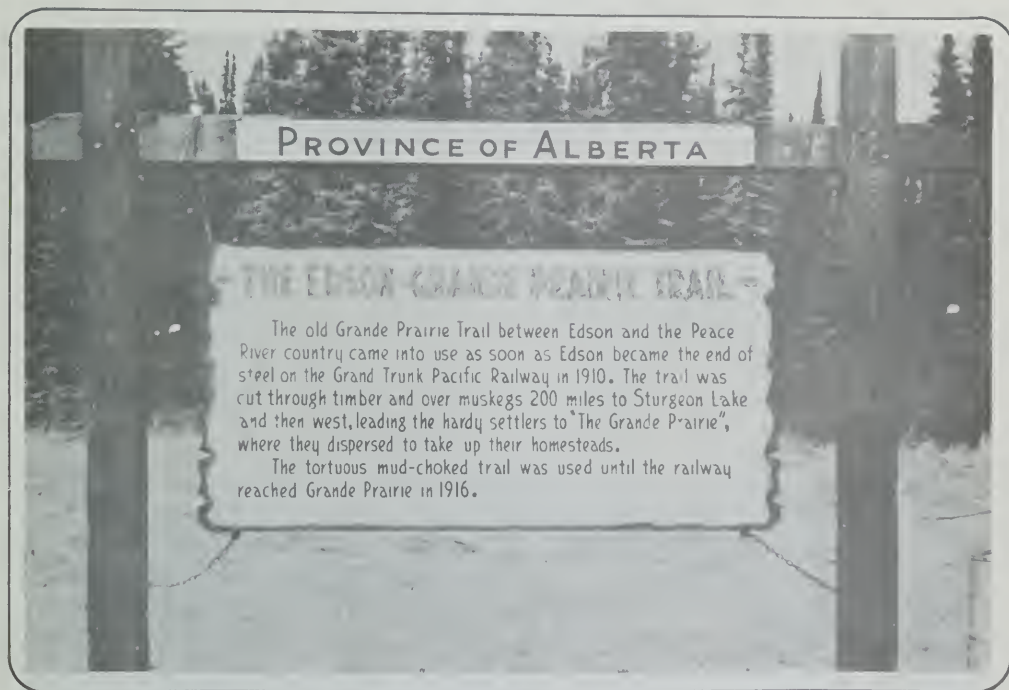
illustrations and documents

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS AND DOCUMENTS

P = Photograph, D=Document, M=Map

- P- 1 Edson—Grande Prairie Trail Sign West of Edson
- P- 2 Gateway: Grande Prairie Peace River District
- P- 3 Homeseekers with Loaded Wagons at Edson
- P- 4 First Stage Coach on the Edson to Grande Prairie Stage Line
- P- 5 Bull Train on Trail to Grande Prairie
- P- 5A Ox Team and Sleigh Leaving Edson For Grande Prairie
- P- 6 Settlers on Edson—Grande Prairie Trail — Two Sleigh Loads
- P- 7 Road Camp on Grande Prairie Trail
- P- 8 Stopping Place on Little Smoky River
- P- 9 Stopping Place on Tony River
- P-10 Mail Horses Edson to Grande Prairie
- P-11 A Pack Train on Edson Trail
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- P-16 Settlers on the Edson—Grande Prairie Trail
- M- 1 Map — Edson—Grande Prairie Trail
- M- 2 Map — Part of Country Between Peace and Athabasca Rivers
- D- 1 Building the Edson Trail — A.H. McQuarrie
- D- 2 Report of Sergeant Clay
- D- 3 On the Edson—Grande Prairie Trail — Harvey A. Switzer
- D- 4 Grand Trunk Pacific Railway Advertisement
- D- 5 C & R Stage Advertisement
- D- 6 Letter — March, 1958 — A.H. McQuarrie
- D- 7 Text of a Radio Broadcast — Tony Cashman
- D- 8 Hell Bent . . . for the 'Peace' — Beatrice Clink
- D- 9 On the Trail Through the Peace River Country
- D-10 The March of Time in the Peace River Country — Dave Williamson
- D-11 A Railway from Edson down the McLeod Valley
- D-12 Settlers Face Food Shortage
- D-13 Ken Liddell Article
- D-14 Edson Flashback — Grande Prairie via Medicine Lodge





EDSON-GRANDE PRAIRIE TRAIL SIGN WEST OF EDSON

Credit - Dave Tewana



GATEWAY: GRANDE PRAIRIE – PEACE RIVER DISTRICT

Credit – Glenbow–Alberta Institute, Calgary, Alberta.



HOMESEEKERS WITH LOADED WAGONS AT EDSON

Credit -- Glenbow- Alberta Institute, Calgary, Alberta.



FIRST STAGE COACH ON THE EDSON TO GRANDE PRAIRIE STAGE LINE

Credit – Glenbow–Alberta Institute, Calgary, Alberta.



BULL TRAIN ON TRAIL TO GRANDE PRAIRIE

Credit – Glenbow–Alberta Institute, Calgary, Alberta.



OX TEAM AND SLEIGH LEAVING EDSON FOR GRANDE PRAIRIE

Credit – Glenbow–Alberta Institute, Calgary, Alberta.



SETTLERS ON EDSON-GRANDE PRAIRIE TRAIL -
TWO SLEIGH LOADS

Credit - Glenbow-Alberta Institute, Calgary, Alberta.



ROAD CAMP ON GRANDE PRAIRIE TRAIL

Credit — Glenbow—Alberta Institute, Calgary, Alberta.



STOPPING PLACE ON LITTLE SMOKY RIVER



STOPPING PLACE ON TONY RIVER

Credit – Glenbow–Alberta Institute, Calgary, Alberta.



MAIL HORSES EDSON TO GRANDE PRAIRIE

Credit – Glenbow–Alberta Institute, Calgary, Alberta.



A PACK TRAIN ON EDSON TRAIL

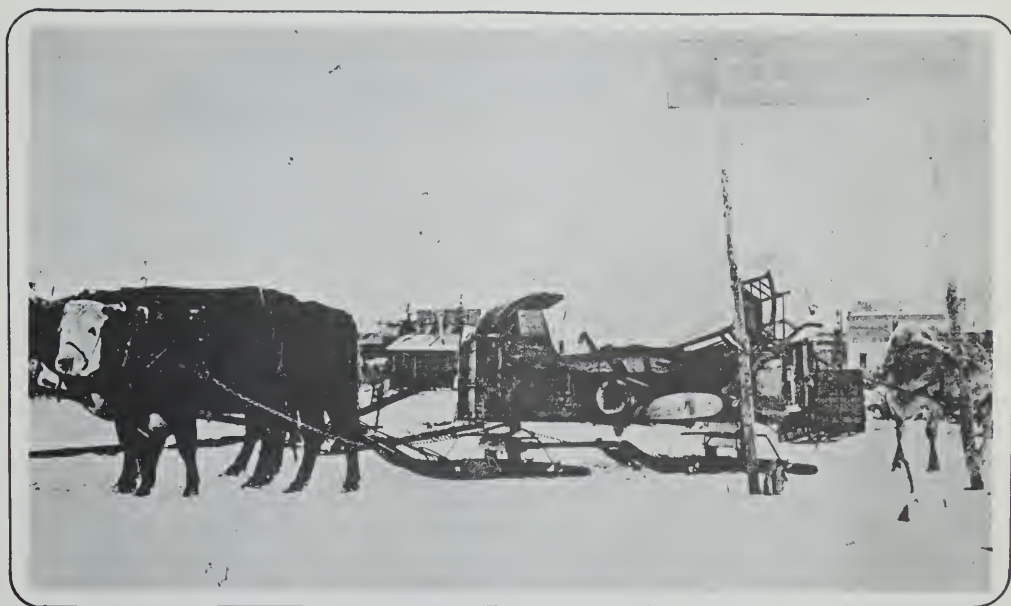
Credit — Glenbow-Alberta Institute, Calgary, Alberta.



A CREE INDIAN FAMILY ON THE EDSON TRAIL

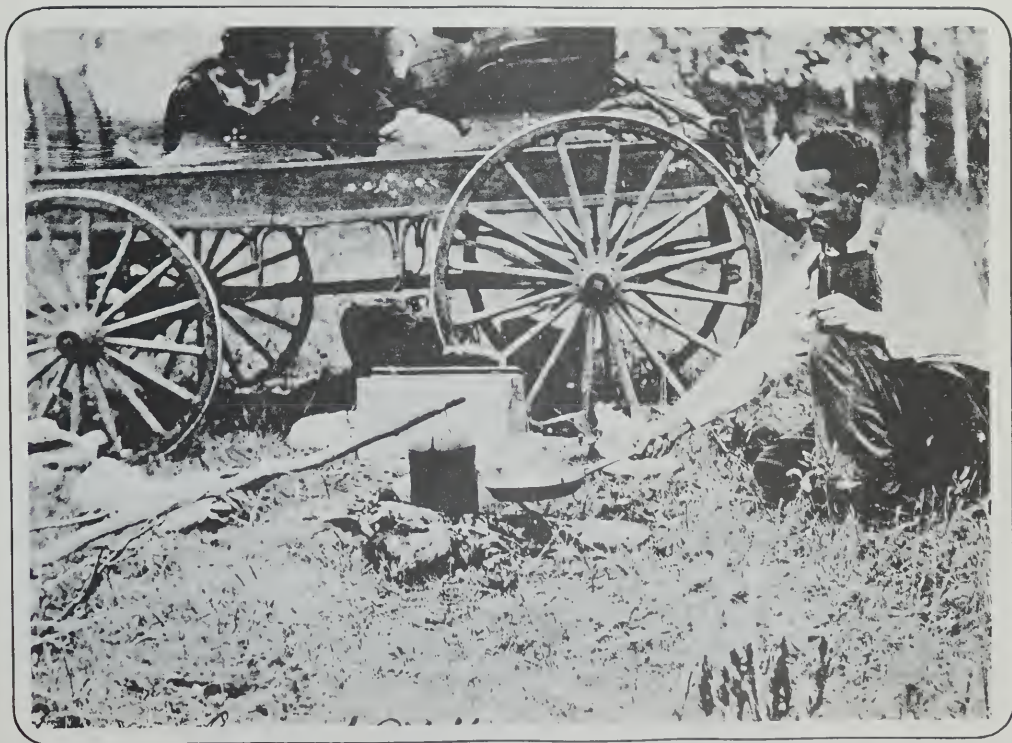
Credit — Glenbow—Alberta Institute, Calgary, Alberta.





BULL TEAM SETTING OUT FOR GRANDE PRAIRIE FROM EDSON

Credit – Glenbow–Alberta Institute, Calgary, Alberta.



SETTLER ON THE TRAIL IN GRANDE PRAIRIE AREA

Credit – Glenbow–Alberta Institute, Calgary, Alberta.



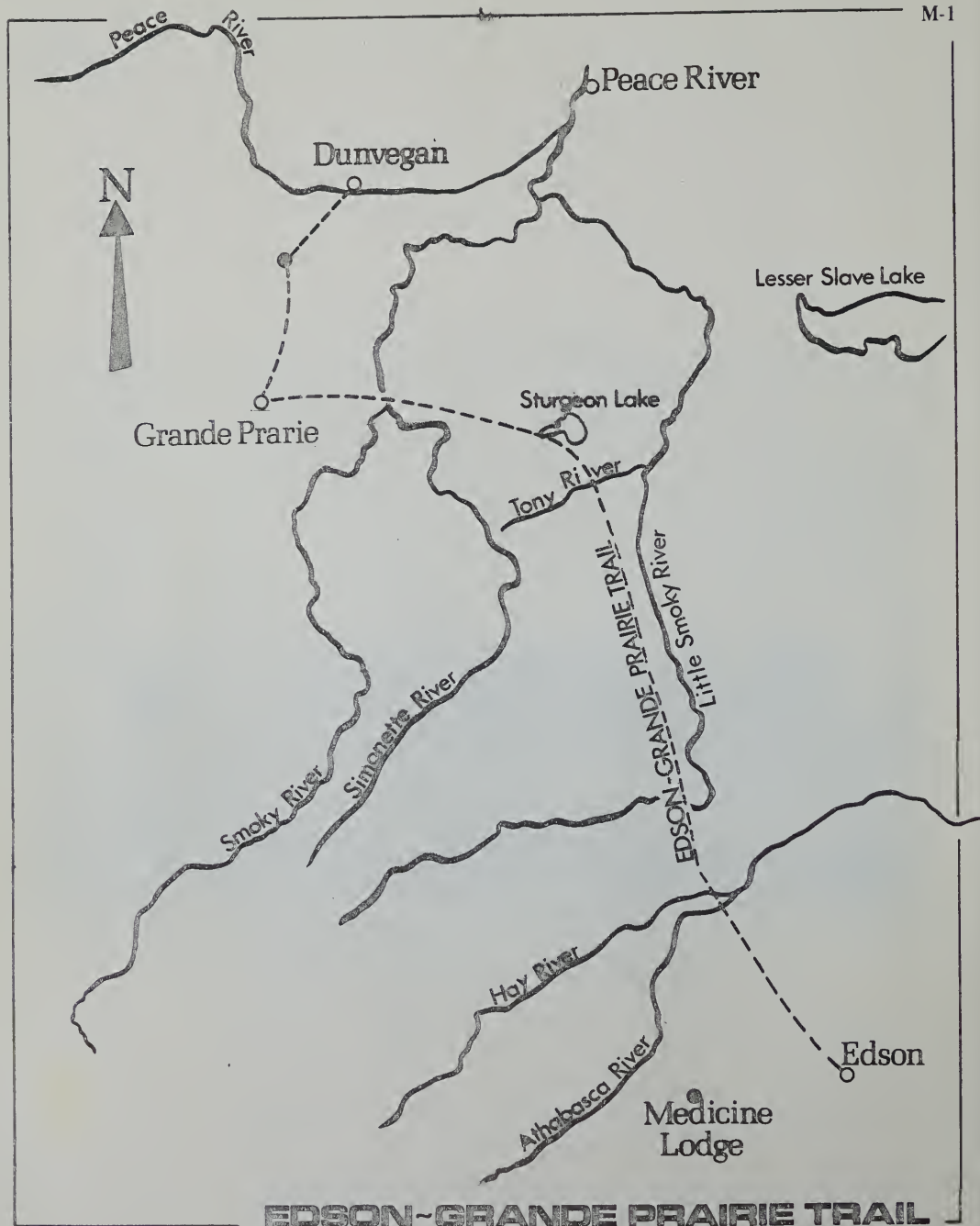
MAN AND DOG PACKING ON EDSON-GRANDE PRAIRIE TRAIL

Credit — Glenbow-Alberta Institute, Calgary, Alberta.



SETTLERS ON THE EDSON-GRANDE PRAIRIE TRAIL

Credit – Glenbow-Alberta Institute, Calgary, Alberta.

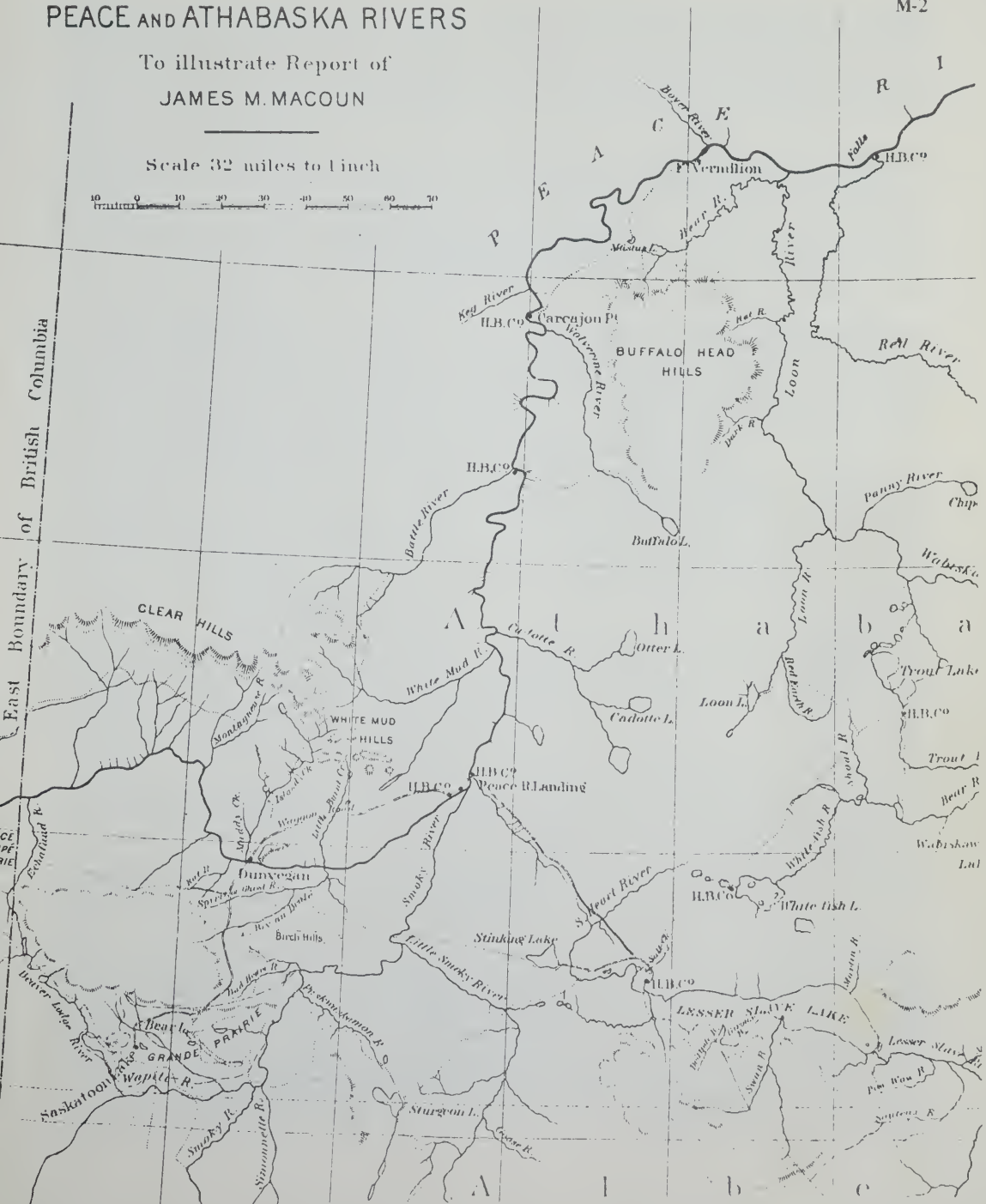


PEACE AND ATHABASKA RIVERS

To illustrate Report of
JAMES M. MACOUN

Scale 32 miles to 1 inch

M-2



BUILDING THE EDSON TRAIL

by
A. H. McQUARRIE

Nothing in connection with my work ever irked me so much as being given credit (or discredit) for having located the Edson Trail. Although I did authorize the changing of some small portions of it after it was turned over to me for completion, I had nothing to do with its location and I was never consulted concerning it. Even J. G. MacGregor, good historian that he is, in his book *The Land of Twelve Foot Davis*, probably after consultation with some of the settlers, wrote that the Provincial Government had me select the route before the work on it was started. No examination of any kind was made before the contract was given to cut a road from Medicine Lodge to Grande Prairie.

It is only fair to John Stocks, then Deputy Minister of Public Works, to say that he had been informed by people he thought reliable, but who had never been over the ground, that the trail would go through park-like country, instead of the roughest part of Alberta aside from the Rocky Mountain section.

In the spring of 1904 I (foolishly) left my employment with the Canadian Pacific Railway and joined a bridge building crew working for the Territorial Government. We worked throughout what is now Saskatchewan in the construction of ferries and wood and steel bridges.

Our work was discontinued during the winter months. Late in 1907, I made a trip to Edmonton where I met Mr. Stocks, who offered me employment with his work force, which I accepted and went to work with Alex Munro. The next year I was put on my own and covered most of the settled parts in building bridges of various kinds and the construction of ferries.

Early in the summer of 1910, Mr. McIntyre, the Chief Engineer, asked that I be made assistant to Mr. McIntosh, then in charge of the location and construction of roads in the areas through which the Grand Trunk Pacific and the Canadian Northern Railways were building. I refused the offer on the ground that I was not experienced enough in the kind of work to take on the responsibility. Later the offer was repeated with the comment that they were having most trouble with men "who know it all". Thus assured, I accepted and worked on various roads in the vicinity of Lac Ste. Anne. The most important was the improvement and some relocation of the trail from Lac Ste. Anne to Whitecourt, which road served until the present road from Whitecourt to Valleyview was paved.

Up to this time I had given some study to engineering and surveying, but I increased my studies from that time on and, although my knowledge of them was all that was needed for my work, it was also such that when I was given supervision of the whole Peace River District, then the largest engineering district in Alberta, no objection was made to my appointment by the Engineering Institute of Alberta.

In the meantime, I had heard rumours of the contract given to clear a road from Medicine Lodge to Grande Prairie, but I was not given any particulars. The fact was that they had contracted to put the road through for \$5,000 which their packer told me was less than they were being paid to clear base lines.

After my work on the Ste. Anne-Whitecourt section was finished, Mr. Stocks directed me to make an examination of the country from Whitecourt to the Little Smoky River with a view to opening a road through that area. In those years road funds were so small that locations had to be on solid ground. Mr. Stocks was very much under the impression that no such ground could be found in the area. In this he was right if the route of the Hash Lake pack trail were to be used. I hired horses from John Goodwin, trader at Whitecourt, and I hired his brother Bert to accompany me. The choice was a good one for he was a pleasant travelling companion, had trapped through that area, and had been to Grande Prairie.

Mr. McQuarrie is a well known Alberta pioneer and was the author of "The 1913 Provincial Election", carried in our Winter 1959 number. He is now a resident of Edmonton.

We travelled the pack trail northwest to near where the House River enters the Little Smoky River. From there we went south along the east bank of the Little Smoky to west of a beautiful little lake the name of which I have forgotten, thence west across the river into the valley of the Toney River (named by me after the Toney River in Nova Scotia where I spent my early boyhood). Feed for our horses had been very scarce since leaving Whitecourt, so we decided to let them feed for a day in the lush grass of the valley of the Toney. I continued walking west until well up on high ground, but did not see any signs of the Medicine Lodge Trail which some outriders thought should be cut out to near Sturgeon Lake by that time.

On our return to Whitecourt, we took time to choose firm ground and we cut and blazed a trail as we went. Because of large stretches of wind-fallen timber progress was very slow and some days did not exceed a mile. A few years later this wind-fallen timber was burned by a forest fire. The weather had turned quite cold and slush ice was running in the river so when we reached where the railway had surveyed their crossing of the river, we decided to cross and go to Whitecourt. I proceeded to Edmonton, which I reached on a Saturday night. I met Mr. Stocks on the street and he asked me to meet him in his office Sunday morning so he could get first-hand information on what I had found. I told him that after the Athabasca River had frozen over I was planning on going out to explore the balance of the route I had blazed from the Little Smoky River to Whitecourt. It was then he gave me the facts about the decision to build a road from Medicine Lodge.

It was near the end of the year that he asked me to examine and report on the condition of the road then cut out to near the Athabasca River. I thought it was the worst road I had ever seen: the terrain was very rough and I thought the clearing such that it left much to be desired for winter travel. I realize now that my report was very indiscreet and was written with the hope that it would stop further work being done on that route. It is probable that the officials in charge thought that my lack of knowledge of such work had much to do with my attitude. In any case, I was notified that the railway then building towards Whitecourt would reach Grande Prairie in a year and in the meantime the trail would serve those who wished to go through with saddle horses or lightly loaded wagons.

The prophets were confused because the Edson Board of Trade undertook to cut a road from Edson to the Athabasca River to intersect the contractors' road at that point and the business people of Edson, together with the local newspaper, advertised the route all over the continent as the "Gateway of the North". The result was that box cars of settlers' effects were arriving in Edson and settlers started north before the road was cut far north of the Little Smoky River. Needless to say the contractors realized by this time that their contract as well as their real estate venture was due to fail. The government in consultation with them agreed to put a government crew on the work and I was selected as the one to see that the road was put through.

I was responsible for the building of the ferries for which the ancient art of whip-sawing had to be revived for the construction of the first three. I was also responsible for the framing of some truss bridges required on other streams. These responsibilities prevented me from having much to do with location after the contractors quit work. It was a Metis named Larocque from the Sturgeon Lake Indian Reserve who did most of the locating from the Little Smoky River to Sturgeon Lake. I do not say the location would have been better if I had done it. It might have been worse. The main stress, however, was on how to avoid heavy clearing.

During the winter I had some stormy sessions with Mr. Stocks (he did the storming) because of the length of time it was taking to cut the road through "easy clearing".

One evening on my way to work (most of the travelling was done on foot because of lack of feed for horses), I met the mail contractor who told me that not only the contractor's crew but also the government crew had quit work and were on the road coming in. The government foreman told me his crew panicked lest they be caught on the north side of the river when it broke up and that they would starve to death. He offered to go back and make a fresh start, but I refused and I decided to go on until I overtook the settlers who had started out from Edson in the hopes that they could get all the way through. At the ferry building camp I borrowed their team of horses, with driver, to take me as far as the Toney River, where we spent the night. In the morning he returned to his regular work and I started walking through the deep snow to overtake the settlers. It was dark before I reached them, somewhere south of the House River Crossing.

The first I overtook was Al Hunter, a good fellow whose action in Grande Prairie some months later caused a sensation, but that is not a part of this story. He asked me to share his bed with him which offer I was glad to accept. In the morning I went on to where the main bunch was stranded. We spent the whole day planning the work. I had met one of their number previously, a Mr. Mosier, and I planned to make him foreman. He refused however, and suggested I appoint Elmer E. Davison, one of a party of three from Weyburn, Saskatchewan. The others were Dr. R. N. Shaw, who later carried on a successful practice at Sexsmith, but who died at an early age and Harvey Switzer who operated a drug store in Edson for many years and is now retired. Mr. Davison remained with me as a road foreman for several years and was one of the best. He started a ranch near Watino, where he died.

After arranging for the work to continue I started to walk back to the ferry camp. I knew I would have to spend at

least one night on the trail. As it was a clear night I decided it was best not to risk the weather being good the following night. I carried lunches and by the following night I had reached a point about three miles south of the Little Smoky, where the trail was cut through dry jackpine windfall. Being tired I decided to rest a short while. I laid some poles on the snow, set fire in the dry wood beside the trail and lay down to rest. I did not intend to sleep but all at once I realized that something was wrong. I had fallen asleep and the fire had flared up and burned the clothes off my back. I fixed up the best I could and started out again. I reached the ferry camp, completely exhausted, about 4 pm the next day but I had lain down in the snow six times in the last mile!

In April of 1911 Mr. Stocks decided to come over the trail, with J. D. Robertson, Chief Engineer of the Department of Public Works, Jim Cornwall and me accompanying him. He and I rode saddle horses and for the others a buckboard and a team of horses was provided. The snow was so deep that the axles of the buckboard levelled it down. Steady but slow progress was made. One day when riding somewhere north of the Baptiste River (now called the Berland River) Mr. Stocks apologized for some of the things he had said about the slow progress being made in getting the road cut through. He mentioned that I had told him about the conditions to be contended with but that he could not comprehend them. I then told him I had planned to quit work but he pleaded with me to stay with him for as he said, "I need you in the opening up of the North". He offered me a substantial increase of wages, which, while not large in comparison with present day wages, was enough to convince me I could not do as well elsewhere. Hence the start of my long years of employment in the north.

While the general public thought there was a lot of muskeg on the trail the amount was comparatively small, the largest being just on the north bank of the Baptiste River. It was the first to be corduroyed. The fact is that the summer of 1911 was very wet and after several loaded wagons went over wet ground it became a quagmire. The quickest way and most practical way to repair such places was to corduroy them. Sometimes the corduroy was covered, sometimes not, which caused much discomfort to those riding wagons but it did keep the trail passable.

As the trail had not been cut out from Sturgeon Lake west, Mr. Stocks and party travelled the winter trail along the Simonette River to the Big Smoky where he arrived as the ice was breaking up. Mr. Robertson managed to cross and went on to Bear Lake where he arranged with Henry Roberts to cut the trail from the Smoky River to Sturgeon Lake. Unlike the rest of the district, that part remained dry until about midsummer and many favourable comments were made about the nice dry road Mr. Roberts opened. After midsummer we travelled over it together and a disappointed man he was! We attended a gathering of the Indians at Sturgeon Lake and we smoked the "pipe of peace" with them. Mr. Stocks and Mr. Cornwall went back by the winter road via Lesser Slave Lake. I accompanied them as far as the Little Smoky River, which I helped them to cross and I then went back to Edson alone.

No one realizes any better than I do the hardships some people endured on the trail. On the other hand many of the stories told and published are the greatest bunk! Philip Godsell, the writer of the story *The Romance of the Alaska Highway*, wrote that the first settlers in Grande Prairie lived on rabbits and the flesh of wild horses that roamed that area. I rode some of those wild horses, after they were tamed, but I have never heard of any one having eaten their flesh. He also wrote of the babies that were born on the trail and also how processions of settlers would stop while they constructed a coffin for one of their dead.

There were not any deaths on the Edson Trail, except a drowning in the Smoky River one time when the ferry was out of service. I was walking towards the river one day when I met a young fellow going back to the road to meet other members of his family (who incidentally settled in the Halcourt District). He told me this boy who, when he heard the ferry was not running, hurried on to the river with the intention of swimming across it. He was taken downstream by the swift current and drowned. There was one birth on the trail at the Jackfish Lake stopping place, where a baby by the name of David Turner was born. There was nothing very unusual about it as Dr. R. N. Shaw was on continuous employment on the trail and in the next stopping place a practical nurse lived and no doubt their services were available. The "baby" now farms at Grande Prairie.

Amusing incidents, to some people, occurred from time to time. In summer I used a saddle horse and I carried a small silk tent on my saddle to keep off the dew and rain. One evening, about 100 miles from Edson, I had hobbled my horse and had my tent up when I noticed two Swedes preparing their bed. I invited them to share the tent with me but they declined the offer. I forgot to warn them that the rabbits, which were very plentiful in that part, would eat leather which had been exposed to perspiration because of its salt content. (Drivers of horses always hung their harness up in trees to avoid this happening). When I woke early the next morning the Swedes were making a commotion and when I looked out, found the rabbits had eaten their boots. I could not do anything to help them and I never saw them again, but I have often wondered how they made out in the rough terrain without boots.

One morning in early spring I arrived, on foot, at the Athabasca River and I found several men who told me that a settler driving a team of horses attached to a sleigh, in which there were several items of settlers' effects, had ignored their advice that crossing on the ice would be unsafe and had driven right on to it. The result was that when about half

way across the river his team broke through the ice. They said he did not even look back but proceeded north on the trail. The men at the river salvaged the harness and proceeded to store the contents of his sleigh.

I proceeded on my way and several miles farther on I found him in a store house belonging to the mail contractor. He was in an agitated state of mind and tried to assure me that he was not doing any harm to my property. I fitted him with a heavy pair of socks, of which I always carried an extra pair, and I directed him to the ferryman's stopping place at the Little Smoky River. He told me to take anything belonging to him which he had left at the Athabasca River. I did not take any of it and I never saw him again. A person who claims he saw him, told me he said if it had not been for me he would have committed suicide.

A former citizen of Grande Prairie, now deceased, used to tell how in the city of Toronto they always used a pail to water their horses. So when he rode to Grande Prairie over the Hash Lake pack trail, he carried a pail on his arm all the way from Edmonton, so he could water his horse at the creeks and rivers.

One time I was talking to a man who became a settler of the West Grande Prairie when a man who became prominent as a settler nearer Grande Prairie town rode up to where we were standing near the Little Smoky River and absentmindedly asked me if I could tell him where he could water his horse. I replied that I would let him drink out of the river. He replied, "That's a good idea". I will not repeat the blasphemy I heard the man I was talking to say under his breath. Incidents of similar kind can be repeated but the above is sufficient to indicate some of those that occurred "on the trail".

Reprinted from Alberta Historical Review, Autumn, 1966

Credit – Glenbow–Alberta Institute, Calgary, Alberta.

SERGEANT S. G. CLAY'S PATROL FROM GRANDE PRAIRIE TO EDSON AND RETURN.

Lesser Slave Lake Sub-District, January 15, 1912

To the Officer Commanding R.N.W.M. Police,
Athabaska Landing.

PATROL REPORT — GRANDE PRAIRIE — EDSON, GTP

Sir, I have the honour to submit the following report of a patrol made by me from this detachment to Edson, Grand Trunk Pacific.

On December 12 last, I received instructions to make this patrol and report on general conditions existing on the trail. I accordingly left this post on December 14, accompanied by Special Const. James Crear (engaged for trip to Edson only) with team Reg. Nos. 228 and 69.

Trail. The trail from Grande Prairie to the Big Smoky River is good, being all prairie, the grade both on the east and west sides of this river being a very easy one and one team could easily handle a load of 30 hundreds.

From the Smoky River to Sturgeon Lake, the trail is in good condition and with very little work this portion of trail could be put in good shape.

From Sturgeon Lake to the House River, trail is in good shape, with exception of the hills on the north and south of the House River. These grades are decidedly bad. A gang of men under Mr. Davidson are at present engaged on this portion of the trail cutting out stumps and are improving trail considerably.

Between the House and Little Smoky rivers the Tony River is crossed, the grades on both sides of this river are also bad, but I understand, that these hills are to be graded this winter.

After leaving the Little Smoky River the Baptiste River is crossed, a new grade is completed here (Frazer grade) and teams will have no difficulty in pulling the hills on both sides of this river.

From the Athabaska River Crossing, the trail into Edson is more or less hilly.

On the return trip from Edson to Grande Prairie, I travelled to the Little Smoky Crossing, and from there followed the river up to a point 25 miles south of Sturgeon Lake.

I would not advise anyone to follow this trail, as in many places the ice is decidedly bad, due to springs and overflows. A party of settlers coming into the Grande Prairie country took this route at the same time as I, but after travelling about 25 miles decided to turn back on account of bad ice. The hill off the ice from the Little Smoky is also very bad.

Taken on the whole, I consider this trail a good one for winter travel, but altogether impossible for a summer trail.

Feed and accommodation. From Grande Prairie to the Big Smoky River hay can be obtained at several places. From that place to Sturgeon Lake there is no hay, and only one small cabin which is a very poor place to stop at.

At Sturgeon Lake baled hay can be obtained at \$1.25 per bale of 75 pounds, meals can also be obtained here.

From Sturgeon Lake to the Little Smoky there is no hay (a distance of about 197 miles). At the Little Smoky River there is baled hay for sale, the prices being \$100 per ton.

After leaving Little Smoky River, the next stopping place is at the Athabaska River. There meals can be purchased, also hay at \$70 per ton.

From the Athabaska to Edson there are stopping places all along the trail, and hay can be purchased at prices ranging from \$70 to \$40 per ton.

Parties leaving Edson for this country should purchase at Edson sufficient forage to carry them from the Little Smoky River to Sturgeon Lake, as feed cannot be obtained between these two places.

The following is a copy of my diary:

December 14. Left quarters at noon and camped for night at Bear Creek. Weather fine, trail good.

December 15. Left camp at 8 am, spelled at Kleshum lakes and camped for night at Callions, Swan lakes. Mileage, 20 miles.

December 16. Left camp at 7 am and camped at Deep Draw at 7 pm. Trail bad for lack of snow. No hay and very poor accommodation at Harpers, no stable, weather fine. Mileage, 30 miles.

December 17. Left camp at 7 am and arrived at Sturgeon Lake at 4 pm. Camped at Revillon's bunk house. Bunk house very dirty and alive with vermin. Baled hay purchased here. Mileage, 25 miles.

December 18. Left Sturgeon Lake at 7 am, camped at 5 pm at Moose Creek. Trail to here is in fairly good shape, gang employed cutting out stumps. Weather fine.

December 19. Left camp at 8 am, grade on both sides of House River is steep and very difficult for a team to pull a load over.

December 20. Left camp at 7 am and camped for night four miles south of Tony River. Trail all day has been bad, stumps, etc. Hill at the Tony is bad. Saw Mrs. Foster re son reported missing. Weather cold.

December 21. Left camp at 8 am. Trail good in am, Smoky crossed, grades good. Oats cached here. Spelled two miles from Swamp Head Creek. Stumps bad from Swamp Head south. Slight fall of snow in pm.

December 22. Left camp at 7 am after two miles travel started to go down Frazer grade to Baptiste River. Grade is very precipitous on north side of Baptiste, on the south side hill is not bad. Gang working here making new grade on North Baptiste, spelled at noon at Athabaska River Crossing. Baled hay and meals purchased here. Camp for night at the Yankee stopping place, baled hay and meals purchased here. Weather stormy.

December 23. Left camp at 8 am, spelled for noon at the Swedes and camped for night at Auger's stopping place. Baled hay and meals purchased here. Trail good, weather stormy.

December 24. Left camp at 8 am, spelled at the Ten Mile stopping place and arrived Edson at 4 pm. Trail good.

January 1. Left Edson at noon, camped for night at Ten Mile stopping place. Meals and hay purchased here. Snowstorm in afternoon.

January 2. Left camp at 8 am, spelled at noon at Swedes and camped for night at Thirty-Five Mile stopping place. Snowing all day.

January 3. Left camp at 7 am, trail bad this am, arrived Athabaska Crossing at 8 pm. Weather stormy.

January 4. Left Athabaska at 8 am, crossed Baptiste River at noon and camped for night at Swamp Head Creek. New grade on north of Baptiste River is completed and is a big improvement on the old grade. Hay and meals purchased here. Weather stormy.

January 5. Left Swamp Head Creek at 7 am, arrived Little Smoky at 11 am, loaded oats and hay from cache and started down river at two o'clock. Travelled about 12 miles this pm. Weather cold and stormy.

January 6. Left camp at 5 am, spelled at 9 am and 2 pm, and camped at 5 pm. Trail has been bad all day due to springs and overflow.

January 7. Left camp at 6 am, and continued following down river, camped at 5 pm. Snowing all day, ice in bad condition.

January 8. Left camp at 8 am, trail on river bad, breaking trail all day, camped at 5 pm. Weather stormy.

January 9. Left camp at 5 am, pulled off river four miles south of Moose Creek, spelled twice, and arrived at Sturgeon Lake at 1 pm.

January 10. At Sturgeon Lake, did not travel. Temp 0.55.

January 11. Left Sturgeon Lake at 7 am and camped for night at Deep Creek. Purchased baled hay at Sturgeon Lake. Temp. 0.40.

January 12. Left camp at 7 am, spelled five miles east of Big Smoky, crossed river at 4 pm and camped for night at Swan lakes. Snowing all day. Trail heavy.

January 13. Left Callions at 8 am, spelled at Shorttriggs and camped at Bear Creek. Trail over prairie heavy. Hay and meals purchased here. Snowstorm in evening.

January 14. Left Bear Creek at 8 am and arrived at Detachment at 2 pm. Weather stormy.

On this patrol I purchased meals in several places thus saving the rations for parts of trail where supplies cannot be purchased.

Distance travelled, 500 miles.

I have the honour to be, sir,
Your obedient servant,
(Sgd.) S. G. CLAY, Corpl.,
Reg. No. 4279.

The Commissioner, Regina. — Forwarded.
T. A. Wroughton, Inspector,
Commanding "N" Division,

Credit — Glenbow—Alberta Institute, Calgary, Alberta.

ON THE EDSON—GRANDE PRAIRIE TRAIL

By
Harvey A. Switzer

Editor's Note: This article by Mr. Switzer has won first prize in the Pioneer Writing Competition of the Society.

During the year 1911 the Department of Interior decided to carry out an aggressive campaign to induce settlement in the great Peace River country. Heavy advertising was done in newspapers and periodicals, brochures distributed through boards of trade, and colonization agents placed in strategic spots in the central and northern United States and in the older settled parts of Canada. Furthermore, the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway which was then pushing its transcontinental line westward had surveyed a branch line from Edson via what is now Whitecourt, northwesterly into Grande Prairie, and was advertising Edson, far and wide, as the "Gateway to the Last Great West". The government also commenced the cutting out of a colonization road from Edson to Grande Prairie, a distance of about 250 miles.

The old route, over which a very few settlers had previously gone into the country, ran from Edmonton north to Athabasca Landing, then westerly along Lesser Slave Lake and on to Peace River Crossing and then south via Dunvegan. This was a distance of 600 miles and practically impossible in the summer months. The great lure was free virgin land, or at least the government was willing to bet you a quarter section of it, 160 acres, against your 10 dollars that you could not live on it for three years. In addition, you could increase your acreage by purchasing South African War Veteran's scrip and also Half Breed scrip on the open market and applying it to Crown Lands.

The writer, who only the previous summer had come out from old Ontario to Weyburn, Saskatchewan, as a young graduate pharmacist of only 21 summers, again felt the call of the West. Forming a partnership with a doctor, R. N. (Bob) Shaw and an Elmer Davidson — a well experienced man of many accomplishments, having been lumberman, farmer, thresherman, etc. — we entrained for Edmonton and arrived in Strathcona late in February. We took the hotel bus, which was horse drawn, over the low level bridge and stayed at the Yale Hotel overnight. The next morning we took the GTP train for Edson and had quite a slow trip out, as westward from Entwistle it was still in the hands of the construction department.

Arriving in Edson, we put up at the old Boston Hotel, where accommodation was rather primitive, the sleeping quarters consisting of one huge big room with a double row of single cots, about 40 or more in all. Davidson went down to Bickerdike, eight miles further west, which was then the end of the steel, and a rip roaring, wide open frontier camp. This place later became the junction for the Alberta Coal Branch. There he purchased a sleigh and a team of huge oxen, one dark red and the other blue and white, which, he insisted, was Paul Bunyan's "Blue Ox" of storied fame in the lumber woods of Michigan and Minnesota. In Edson, we secured a site for a small cache in which we left our trunks with such personal belongings as we did not wish to take on the trail. We gathered an outfit together, consisting of baled hay and grain for the oxen, a small stove, food for ourselves, mostly staples, flour, beans, rice, baking powder, salt, sugar, tea and coffee and fat salt pork commonly called "sow belly", cooking utensils and some medicines and first aid supplies and tools.

We left Edson on March 5, 1911, being the first outfit to leave for Grande Prairie. Just as we were leaving, someone snapped a picture of us and we were more or less "immortalized" by the sale of thousands of post cards of the picture and it later became one of the illustrations in a book which was written by an Anglican missionary stationed at Edson. We had been assured by the local board of trade that although the trail was not quite all cut out, it undoubtedly would be by the time that we got up there and that we should encounter no particular difficulties.

We encountered many varied experiences on that trail, but space will permit of the setting down of only a few of

them here. Travelling by ox team is a rather slow and tedious business, we usually walked except for the one driving and probably averaged not more than 20 miles a day. Each night we cooked up a meal, fed our oxen, cut spruce boughs to make a bed at the rear end of the sleigh, set a couple of poles up leaning on the sleigh, threw a tarpaulin over them to make an improvised tent and slept there for the night. The temperatures usually went down well towards zero during the night and sometimes even below so it was not too pleasant when we were not inured to it. Water for cooking was melted snow and that winter the rabbits were almost as thick as flies, with their trails criss crossing all over the woods. We would pick out what we fondly thought was some nice clean snow to melt for our coffee or other requirements, but when it was melted we found at least a few "rabbit berries" floating around on the top. We would then pitch it out and get some more but with the same results, so after a few trials, we stoically skimmed them off and used the water. The bread soon ran out and flapjacks and bannock took its place. Sometimes these did not turn out too well being somewhat under cooked and they would be facetiously referred to as "dough gods". However, the cold bracing air and hard exercise gave us wonderful appetites so no one suffered or complained. Even the doctor, who on the start had been picking out the bits of fat from the good side bacon which we had then, was munching down the fat sow belly without a tremor.

Some 40 odd miles out of Edson, where the high land makes its first break down to the benches of the Athabasca Valley we encountered a very steep declivity, later known as "Break Neck Hill". In order to negotiate this in safety we wrapped several log chains around the runners of our sleigh. We then chopped down a jackpine tree about 30 feet tall, cut off all the branches about 15 inches from the trunk so that they would dig in well, and chained the top of it to the rear of our loaded sleigh so as to hold it back from over-running the oxen. We continued on across the Athabasca on the ice and on across the Little Smoky River.

A couple of days later we met the road foreman, Sides, who with his crew was hurrying back to Edson before the ice would go out, as there was as yet no ferry on the river. He assured us however that foreman Woodward was cutting through from the other end and that if we would camp at the end of the cutting when we reached it, we would have only a few days to wait as there were only a very few miles left to be cut. We learned later however, that Woodward with his crew was hurrying out just as fast in the other direction.

When we arrived at the end of the cutting, we found a Cree half-breed named Larocque and a North Carolinian school teacher who had purchased supplies from the camp and stayed behind and whom we promptly named "Sam McGee". We learned later that he had stayed around there for a few months panning some gold out of the streams and, going down to Edson with his samples, he had induced several citizens to put up money for a gold staking venture.

The next day an old sourdough of the trail of Ninety-Eight, pulled into our camp with a sleigh and team of small oxen. A day or two later three Americans arrived with two sleighs and a bunch of loose cayuses. They were from Montana, one being a shepherd, one a cowboy and the other a very talkative gentleman of unknown talents and called B. S. Smith. Some of us hired Larocque to make a trip up to Sturgeon Lake to see if we could arrange to purchase hay for our livestock. At Sturgeon Lake the Hudson's Bay Company and Revillon Freres each maintained a trading post. There was also a Roman Catholic mission, school and church and numerous Indian log dwellings. He returned in about a week and reported that there was no hay at all to be had and further that there was about 60 miles of bush to cut through before we reached there. We did not believe him at the time, but found out later that it was too true.

Several more landseekers arrived within the next week with various outfits, and then the government road engineer, A. H. McQuarrie, arrived on the scene. He organized a government road crew of all those who were able and willing to cut trail. A cook sleigh was readied with a stove and supplies with a cook in charge. This sleigh also carried the workers' dunnage (or war bags) containing our blankets and a change of clothing. This sleigh kept right along with us as we progressed, served our midday meal and supper where we halted for the night. Along at this point we worked through a belt of very heavy snow, there being more than five feet in the sheltered woods. This being now late in March, the snow was fairly soft, although crusted on top by the bright sunshine, and each step we took it would support our foot until we really put our weight on it, when down we would sink, so that every night we were soaked to the skin. After eating we built huge camp fires, stripped to the skin, put on dry clothing from our bags and after drying our wet clothing, rolled it in our bags for a change next night. We then rolled up in our blankets spread on a bed of spruce boughs and slept soundly until we heard the cook's call early next morning. The rest of the landseekers followed us at their leisure with the animals and outfits. This same routine went on day after day. We picked up the dog sled trail from Lac Ste. Anne to Sturgeon Lake and followed it for many miles. This ran along the westerly side of House River (Waskahigan being the Indian name) across numerous very deep ravines where the creeks ran down to the river, but early in the summer the route was resurveyed and changed to the east side of the river where the terrain was much flatter.

Several amusing incidents occurred during the cutting operations. There was no large timber, most of the trees being poplar, with the largest probably six or eight inches. Nevertheless we would more or less continuously hear the cry of "timber!" ring out on the clear air. One of the party had a dollar watch which stopped every few hours, and several

times each day he would draw it from his pocket, look at it intently and shout: "What time is it?" One night while drying out our clothing, one of the party had built his fire at the base of a spruce tree which was covered with a considerable amount of gum, and hung his pants to dry from a branch. When the fire got going well the spruce gum caught alight, the fire went up the tree with a roar and the pants bellied out like a balloon. Later the owner was seen raking among the ashes and leaves to recover the pocket knife, coins, etc., which had been in the pockets.

When we finally won through to the end of the old cutting, several miles south of the Sturgeon Lake, the crew was disbanded. It was now well on into April and as none of the outfits had sufficient fodder along with them, many of the animals had died enroute. Most of those which survived, except those able to travel, were driven onto the flats of the Little Smoky where there was considerable frozen grass, filling but not very nourishing. We had lost our blue ox and put the red ox on the river with the others.

We built a cache of poplar logs and placed in it our sleigh and all our gear, with the exception of what we would carry on our backs for the rest of the journey. This included our blankets, frying pan, tin plate and cup, cutlery, some grub and a hand axe. About the time we were ready to start off, along came a spanking team of horses with John Stocks, Deputy Minister of Public Works, Jim Cornwall, "The Apostle of the North", and Road Engineer MacQuarrie. The team was driven by a young man named Robertson, then an engineer in the department, later, I believe becoming deputy minister. They were on an inspection trip of the new road.

We caught up with them that night at Sturgeon Lake and visited with them in the home of the Factor of the Hudson's Bay trading post. Jim Cornwall, who knew that country like the palm of his hand, and who spoke Cree fluently, bargained with the senior Indian Chief Red Moose, for the only hay in Sturgeon Lake, five bales. In order to get it however, he had to hire Red Moose as a guide to take them over the Big Smoky River. He said later that they did not need a guide any more than a wagon needs a fifth wheel but they did need the hay.

The next morning they set out with their team and wagon. There had as yet been no trail cut through, but the country was fairly open, a great deal of it having been burnt over and there was a lot of beaver meadow country. For mile after mile we followed beaver meadows, crossing over narrow timbered ridges from one to another. There must have been hundreds of thousands of beaver taken out of that country in the early days.

We followed their trail all day long and arrived late at night on the Simmonette River, where we stopped near an Indian encampment. There, in spite of barking dogs and noises typical of an Indian village, we slept soundly until late the next morning, being tired out from our hard hike of the previous day. We again followed the wagon trail and early in the afternoon reached the brow of the Big Smoky valley near Bezanson. We found that the party had already been down to the river, Cornwall had crossed over on the ice and back again, but by the time they reached the top of the valley the ice had already broken and was running in the stream. As there was no way of crossing there, we went downstream a couple of miles to where the two Goodwin brothers had a camp, afterwards known as "Goodwin's Crossing". We stayed with them a couple of days until the ice running in the river thinned out somewhat, when they took us across in a row boat.

We again took up our trail for the "Mecca" of Grande Prairie. After ascending the western banks of the Big Smoky valley, the land levelled out but all around the outer edge was bush and scrub, gradually thinning out towards the centre, with various sized patches of scrub giving the country a park-like appearance, while the very central part of the prairie was pretty well bare of scrub, except for a little along the water courses. This was now well along in April and the snow was melting fast. All one morning we slogged through water up to our ankles and at times to our knees through what was known as the Red Willow Flats. This was in later years all drained off into the Smoky as a government project and the land all settled.

That evening we reached Bear Creek, where a man by the name of Bredin had a "stopping place". This later became the site of Grande Prairie City. The next day we hiked over to the trading post at Lake Saskatoon, at the west end of the lake, where there was quite a little village. Outside of this place there were very few people in the whole Grande Prairie country, just a comparatively few settlers who had come in a few years before by the long trail. A few around Bear Lake, a few over at Beaverlodge and Red Willow and two or three at Buffalo Lakes were about all.

The next morning we replenished our grub supply and started out looking for suitable land on which to file. We spent approximately the next week running cut lines, taking the section numbers from the iron survey stakes in the corner mounds of quarters that took our fancy. We slept out on the prairie at night and sometimes it was pretty cold, it being late in April. We would awaken with the sun in the morning and the white hoar frost covering the blankets all around our heads.

To show that we chose wisely in the selection of land, it was mostly all in the area in which the town of Sexsmith was later established and which became the largest primary grain shipping point in the British Empire. Some weeks later when the land rush developed in earnest, the government established a sub-land office, but at that time the closest place

at which we could file homestead entries was Grouard at the west end of Lesser Slave Lake, some 75 miles north of Sturgeon Lake. So we headed back for Sturgeon Lake and from there took the winter trail for Grouard. The first day out we met another man on a similar errand who then travelled along with us. When we got to the Little Smoky River crossing, we found it in full flood, with the swollen waters running almost to the top of its banks. There was a dugout which travellers used, but it was on the opposite shore. So we went to work with our hand axe and cut logs from a pile of driftwood, lashed them together with the ropes from our packs, cut out two steering paddles, loaded our packs on the raft and started across. The doctor, being inexperienced, headed the raft downstream for the opposite bank, so it was a little while before I could exert my own paddle enough to swing us upstream so that the current carried us over, albeit a distance downstream. We made camp there for the night and very early the next morning we awoke with rain coming down on us. We got up before our blankets got too wet, cooked breakfast and started off. The rain continued more or less all day and it was not long before the water was trickling off the bottom of our packs and down our legs. Just at evening we arrived at West Prairie River opposite a homesteader's log shack, and found a small boat there. As it would not hold us all and our packs, we had to make two trips. The doctor was in the first load and having the paddle did the same as with the raft, so it was almost a half mile downstream before he reached the other side, then the boat had to be pulled laboriously upstream again by means of a rope. We were pretty well played out when we were all finally across and soaked through. The new Indian moccasins which I had donned that morning were worn right through.

The homesteader was very hospitable so we were able to have a hot meal, get dried out and have a good sleep where it was dry and warm. The next morning we set off for Grouard where we filed on our land, and set off on our return journey to Sturgeon Lake, where we arrived in good time.

As I stated previously, Davidson was a well experienced man and the road engineer had arranged for him to be foreman of a road gang when we returned. So we then started south to where we had cached our belongings. Davidson began hiring some men from the settlers coming up the trail, some of whom were willing to work for a few weeks before continuing on their way. I was taken on as cook, it being the best paying job next to that of the foreman. We recovered our big red ox and he bought two more teams to work, oxen being much more suitable than horses for the work we had to do. There was none of today's heavy road machinery. We had a plough, a slip scraper, shovels, axes and grub hoes. We did ditching, laid corduroy, built small bridges and on very steep hills did some side hill grading.

Our food was good but simple and not too much variety. We drew our supplies from the trading post and there were no tinned fruits, fresh vegetables or other luxuries. We had tinned jam, butter in two pound tins, dried fruits in 25 pound wooden boxes, desiccated vegetables in five and seven pound sealed tins and other staples. Prices were very high, but of course freight was seven cents a pound, which had to be added to everything. Trade flour was \$12 per cwt., high patent flour bought from incoming settlers brought \$16, sugar was \$20 per cwt., beans \$24 for a 120 pound bag and salt pork \$40. We augmented our salt pork with the odd rabbit or wild chicken, as well as dried moose meat and bear meat from the Indians. At rare times we were able to buy fresh moose meat from the Indians, but it would always be bony front quarter meat, as they dried the better cuts. Once we were able to buy two sacks of potatoes, which was all the fresh vegetables we had all summer. One day, one of the crew shot a year old bear which was a welcome change in our diet.

Our crew varied from seven or eight men to a high of 27. Dr. Shaw worked on the crew for a short time and then he relieved the factor of Revillon Freres trading post, who went out on a holiday. During the summer we worked at several locations from our starting point right through to the west bank of the Big Smoky and part way back again. When we moved camp, we loaded everything on the wagon, hooked the oxen up two and two with the big red ox on the lead, and I drove them to our next camp.

Situated as we were, we had a ringside seat on the great tide of land seekers flowing into the country. There were people from every part of Canada and the United States and from every walk of life – farmers, ranchers, laborers, school teachers, doctors and lawyers. And the outfits were just as varied. One man might have nothing but his pack, another a single wagon drawn by horses or oxen, and another outfit would consist of several wagons loaded with farm machinery and supplies of all kinds. One party we remembered particularly consisted of two school teachers married to two school teachers, quite young couples, having come from the city of Vancouver.

The trail was hard and wearisome and for some almost heartbreaking. Wagons would become bogged down in the

mud, mosquitoes in swarms worried both man and beast, and for a period of six weeks it rained at some time in the day, every day. But all were imbued with the hope of a new home in a new land and pressed on in spite of all hardships.

With freeze up, about the end of October, road work ceased and camp was broken up. About this time we dissolved our partnership. Dr. Shaw became dissatisfied, and Davidson, although not saying anything, was not too happy about the way some things were working out, so we got together and made a final settlement of our mutual affairs. Dr. Shaw stayed in Grande Prairie where he practiced medicine and later at Sexsmith until his untimely death. Elmer Davidson stayed in the country and started a cattle ranch at Watino where the railway crosses the Big Smoky and was quite successful.

Early in the fall, one of my brothers had joined our crew, and when camp broke up, we decided to take a trip around the prairie before going back to Edson, as we planned to visit relatives in B.C. over Christmas. So we started off and took another look at the land on which we had filed, one of the quarters being in his name. Game birds were very plentiful. The prairie chickens were gathering into flocks for the fall, and we often saw flocks of two or three hundred birds. There were hundreds of geese and literally thousands of ducks. At one place, known as the "Twin Lakes," (one of these now being at Clairmont and the other fairly well dried up) ducks and geese were constantly flying in huge flocks from one lake to the other. However, the greatest wonder to me was the way the prairie had been settled in that one summer. In the spring the whole prairie was open and unsettled and in the fall it was dotted in every direction with log shacks and little pieces of breaking. I also found that during the summer a new town, Grande Prairie City, had been staked out although there was not as yet a single building erected on the site. I had to go over to Lake Saskatoon to visit the bank, so I went by myself and stayed overnight. I left there early the next morning and took a short cut across the lake which was then frozen over solid. When I was well out on the ice I heard from the direction of some bush on the one shore the most unearthly sounds that I had ever heard. I thought that all the devils in hell had been let loose and my heart flopped over a couple of times and almost stopped. However I soon recovered when a band of five coyotes trotted out on the ice, they having been responsible for all the noise. I joined my brother at Bear Creek and we started on our return journey to Edson.

By this time a number of "Stopping Places" had been established along the trail. These were usually situated near a stream to assure a water supply. The owner supplied a fairly large room furnished with a cook stove, a table or two and a few benches. For a small fee they could use the facilities, cooking their own food, or could buy a meal for themselves and also for their animals if needed. They were usually designated by the mileage from Edson, or the name of the party who operated it, and sometimes by both.

At Sturgeon Lake we met with three other men who were returning to Edson on foot and travelled with them. The longest stretch at that time on which there were no stopping places was from Sturgeon Lake to Tony River, a distance of 75 or 80 miles. The first night out we made camp at Moose Creek. The weather had turned bitterly cold going down to 35° below zero, so we spent a very uncomfortable night. We built up a huge fire and one of us took turns at keeping it burning throughout the night. The following night we camped in fairly open poplar country near House River, but the temperature had risen some and we did not fare too badly. The next day, at around two o'clock, we arrived on the hillside above the Tony River stopping place. We cooked up all the remainder of our grub and lazed around camp for the afternoon. We planned that we would buy our supper there and stay for the night. Around five o'clock we walked down to the stopping place and found the wife and children of the owner who told us that she could not possibly feed us as her husband had gone down to Edson for supplies and as she was not sure when he would return she could not spare a bit of food of any kind.

The next stopping place was at Little Smoky River about 12 miles further on, so there was nothing else to do but head for there. It was past six by the time we got started and darkness would be coming very soon. The last few miles the trail wound through a big spruce swamp with trees about 20 or 25 feet high, which made it pretty dark on the narrow trail. It had been cut through the previous winter when snow was on the ground so the stumps were quite high and on these we stubbed our moecasin clad toes as we struggled along. We reached the stopping place which was run by two men, about 9:30 pm. They had shot a moose that day and soon had steaks frying on the stove. Never in our lives had we smelled anything so absolutely delicious and we did full justice to them.

The next night we stopped at Mile 35, the Scotchman's Place. Here we arranged with a man who was returning to Edson with a team and empty sleigh to take our packs so that we could travel light. We were in top notch physical

condition and could walk four miles an hour for hour after hour. We arrived at Mile 20, the Frenchman's, about 11:30 am but had to wait for dinner to be gotten ready, so that it was 1:00 pm before we got away, and we made Edson at about 5:15 pm, tired but happy.

We then took the train for Revelstoke, B.C., where we visited with relatives over Christmas. Right after New Year's, I returned alone to Edson, my brother remaining behind. After several adventures, which could form the basis for another story, I decided not to return to Grande Prairie but located at Edson. I opened a drug store there in January, 1912, which I have operated continuously since that time. On occasion when meeting old timers in town or in the Peace River country, the Edson-Grande Prairie Trail furnishes food for many reminiscences of those bygone days.

Reprinted from Alberta Historical Review, Summer, 1960

GRAND TRUNK PACIFIC RAILWAY

Edson · Grande Prairie Stage

Leaves Edson and Grande Prairie every Tuesday and
Friday at 8 a.m., arriving at destination in 7 days

Carries Passengers, Express & Baggage

MAKING CONNECTIONS WITH STAGE TO

Spirit River, Dunvegan and Peace River Crossing, also
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Stopping places have been installed all along the route at the
following mileages from Edson: 9, 20, 35, 45, 50, 70, 80, 90, 95, 130, 160

The Government has thrown open for homesteading
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Peace River Country, and the short cut through Edson
over the road above mentioned is proving very
acceptable to ingoing homesteaders.

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Leaves Edson Tuesdays and Fridays at 7 a.m. Leaves Grande Prairie City Wednesdays and Saturdays at 7 a.m. Special Accommodation for ladies. Provision may be secured on the trail.

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Edson to Grande Prairie	\$26.00
Return	50.00
Edson to Saskatoon Lake	27.70
Return	53.00
Edson to Beaver Lodge	29.75
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Return	52.00
Edson to Spirit River	31.50
Return	60.00
Edson to Dunvegan	34.00
Return	65.00

Passengers are allowed 30 pounds baggage. Excess baggage charged at express rates. Express handled to all points north.

CAYWOOD & ROBB

Office in Hope Building, Edson, opposite Commercial Hotel.

Credit - Glenbow--Alberta Institute, Calgary, Alberta.

LETTER BY A.H. McQUARRIE TO HIS DAUGHTER, MARCH, 1958

We lived in Edson where your father and your Uncle Mac were born, until the summer of 1914, when the Edson Trail was practically completed and a general foreman was appointed by the Department of Public Works for the Edson District and he handled any further work done. We moved back to Edmonton and in the next two years I was required to look into many projects in various places, several of them in the Peace River District. In 1916, I was asked if I would undertake the oversight of all public works in that area. This was not a very heavy assignment, but it meant travelling by train back and forth several times during the summer; and by that time the man who had built the railway was going broke, the railway was much in need of repair, and it was a common thing for a car or engine to go off the track. So much so, that the crews operating the trains were very expert in getting them back on. When the CPR leased the Line it was said that when that happened with them their crews were almost at a loss to know what to do. Service was improved and the north country continued to develop and my trips became more numerous. Until about 1919, I, like other general foremen, was paid a not very generous wage, but good compared to wages on other work, but there was always a shortage of money for living and the payment of interest on the mortgage on our home. (There was never enough money to pay anything on the principal) so it was a pleasant surprise to be called to the Deputy Minister's office one day as the Minister was leaving it to be told that I would have an increase in salary of several hundred dollars a year. It did not take much reasoning on my part to realize that I was then on the same wage scale as the engineers.

In the spring of 1922, the Government formed the Province into 11 engineering districts with a district engineer in charge of each. I was asked if I would take the Peace River District which was the largest and which, because of the difficulties of travel and the fact that but a small part of it was organized into municipal districts, was the most difficult to handle. I consented, perhaps not with enough consideration for I learned afterwards that I had been considered for the Red Deer District, probably the best in the Province because only a small part of it was unorganized. I believe I could have handled it from Edmonton and thus saved the expense of establishing a new home.

It was given to a man from Southern Alberta but I understand he ran into difficulties and I was told on good authority that they considered bringing me back to handle it. I have no illusions that I would have done any better, for the people in some districts had been spoiled politically and otherwise and it is likely I was well out of it.

The Minister of Public Works in announcing the appointments classed me as an engineer. Whether this was from ignorance or by design I do not know. I do know that I never used the title and it caused me some embarrassment, but the people of the North accepted it without question. Perhaps I am too modest for I know of two others higher in office who were classed as engineers who, I am sure, never graduated.

I should have mentioned that when I was on construction work in Saskatchewan in the autumn of 1907 I left the outfit in charge of another person and went home when I heard my father was sick. After a conversation with his doctor I decided to stay with him until he died. I did not have to wait long for one evening after he had been up and we talked about several things over which he had worried, I helped him to bed and a few minutes afterwards he passed away before I could call my mother. I am sure his death was hastened by the hardships he went through in his first years in the West. Two months later my mother died from an attack of pneumonia, and they are buried in the Carnoustia cemetery which my father was instrumental in having started and he was the first adult to be buried in it.

Perhaps some day, Donna, I may write the greater story of the thirty years which I have mentioned. Better get your Father to trim this one down to a proper size.

A.H. McQuarrie

Credit - Glenbow-Alberta Institute, Calgary, Alberta.

**TEXT OF A RADIO BROADCAST BY TONY CASHMAN – SEPTEMBER 1959
PART OF SERIES – “THE EDMONTON STORY”**

Almost all the historic trails of Alberta are preserved as super highways, but not so the Edson Trail. It would make a super highway acceptable only to mountain goats. The Edson Trail is preserved only in legend and story – about the only medium in which it would keep. But it's a fine story. We got it this week from Mr. A.H. McQuarrie, who is in town visiting his daughter, Mrs. Dick Hanna. Mr. McQuarrie began a career as a government engineer with the old Northwest Territorial government in 1903. He was engineer on the Edson Trail, and it's been 20 years now since Mr. McQuarrie reached the retirement age of 65, so he can tell a lot about the “breaking” of the west.

Listening to Mac McQuarrie's account of the Edson Trail, it becomes clear that the Edson Trail was a product of a number of things: The determination of hundreds of settlers to push into the Peace River Country; The determination of Mr. Morris Kimp to make something of the town of Medicine Lodge, Alberta; and the determination of the Edson Boosters to make something even greater of Edson.

In the winter of 1910 and 1911, these ingredients produced the Edson Trail. Morris Kimp was the chap who started it. Mr. Kimp had been a dominion land surveyor. He was later Belgian consul in Edmonton, and had a hand in the inter-urban railway to St. Albert. Mr. Kimp wanted to make Medicine Lodge the gateway to the Peace River Country. Medicine Lodge was a city-in-paper, 25 miles west of Edson on the transcontinental railway. Mr. Kimp persuaded the provincial government that he could build – for only \$5,000 – a 230 mile trail from Medicine Lodge to Grande Prairie. Mr. Kimp, unfortunately, had never been over the country between Medicine Lodge and the Peace River. He didn't realize it was the darnedest country in all Alberta. It's as though the Creator made the majestic mountains rising high on the western fringe of Alberta – then smoothed out the prairies in easy rolling swells – and then piled the left-over rocks in hideous heaps in the corner between the transcontinental railroad and the Peace River Country. Mr. Kimp didn't realize this, and in the fall of 1910 started out with a crew of 15 men to cut a road north to the Peace River Country. And the boys from Edson, 25 miles closer to Edmonton – from whence the settlers would be coming – nipped in to cut him off. Yes, the boys from Edson cut a trail over to join Mr. Kimp's trail at the Athabasca River. Why plod another 25 miles to Medicine Lodge? Turn off for the Peace River at Edson – the true gateway to the Peace River Country. Take the Edson Trail chanted the boys from Edson. They chanted it in big newspaper ads. They figured it would be good business for Edson – and it was very good business. They figured Mr. Kimp would hack the trail through to the promised land, and Edson would get all the gravy. They advertised the Edson Trail as the short way to the verdant farmland of the mighty Peace – the nice short way – much better than the awful long way – by Athabasca Landing and Lesser Slave Lake. Go by Edson – and er, yes, – get your supplies in Edson as you go.

The advertising was certainly effective. There were homesteaders passing through Edson with their ox teams and heading north over the trail – before the trail was cut through. Early in 1911, Mr. Kimp ran out of money and quit. The government put Mac McQuarrie on the job to see what could be done to salvage the debacle. Mr. McQuarrie was not too happy about the assignment. The previous fall he had been through the country and recommended that a trail be cut from Whitecourt to Valleyview. In the present decade, Mr. McQuarrie's recommendation of 1910 had taken shape as the Valleyview Cutoff – a modern highway. But in January, 1911, he got a horse in Edson and rode north up the trail. Up? Did we say? Yes, up also down. Up, down. Up, down. Up, down. The Edson Trail was all up and down over a hideous tangle of hills. He met Mr. Kimp's crew coming out. And he met the government crew coming out too. The men in this crew were afraid they'd get trapped by the spring breakup on the Athabasca and would starve to death. So they were pulling out. But McQuarrie rode on. At the end of the trail, 100 miles north of Edson, he found the first of the homesteaders. There were 15 men in the party. They had come to the end of the trail, and were trying to decide what to do. Then along came McQuarrie. They had a long talk. Mac McQuarrie could see they were determined to get

through. So he hired them — at 25 cents an hour — to hack the trail. He told them that if they could chop through the next 65 miles, it would get them to Sturgeon Lake (now Valleyview), and from there they'd be in reasonably flat country, and could run their sleighs right in to Grande Prairie. The men named Elmer Davison their foreman — and they hacked a path wide enough for their sleighs — for 65 miles to Sturgeon Lake.

By spring of 1911, the Edson Trail was open — just open mind you — just open enough for a sleigh. In the spring, McQuarrie was at work with 75 men — in half a dozen crews — widening the trail to 25 feet, building ferries — four of them — and trying to corduroy the muskegs. Their equipment was picks, axes and grub-hoes. They managed to widen the trail all right. But when it came to the stumps — they were stumped. The miles of trail that weren't made hideous by steep grades and muskegs were made hideous by stumps. But still the settlers poured through by the hundreds, while the boys from Edson sang the joys of the Edson Trail — and er, ahem — the joys of buying one's supplies in Edson.

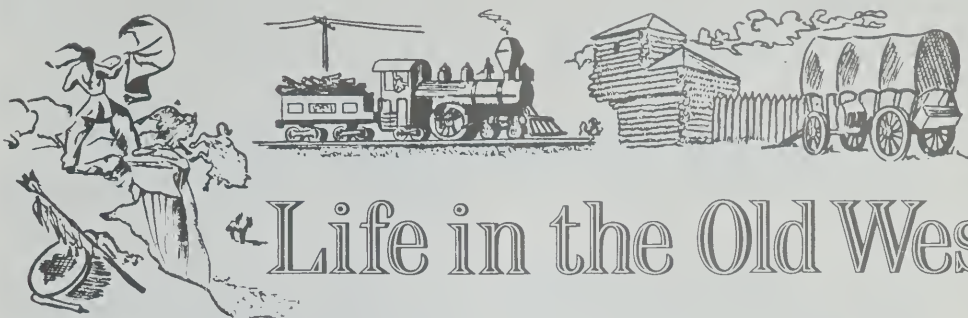
In 1911, settlers with ox teams setting off for the Peace River were a common sight on Jasper Avenue. Sir John Martin-Harvey, the English actor, used to stand on the curb of Jasper Avenue, swept away by the drama of these processions. Martin-Harvey would stand there, saying to himself: "Here I stand at the beginning of things — at the very beginning of things". It took most families two to three weeks to get through from Edson. Many set out cheerfully with things like pianos in their kit. Many of these bulky things had to be left along the trail and called for at a later date. But Mr. McQuarrie says nothing was ever looted. People, he says, never thought of taking anything that didn't belong to them in those days. The mailman-carriers even left the registered letters on the wagons when they stopped some place for the night.

Tough as the trail was, the volume of mail was proof of how many hundreds of people were getting through. On his first trip in the spring of 1911, the government mail-carrier had one letter. By the fall, he was pushing the mail with four-horse teams. And the Peace River fever spread to the real estate promoters. They set up the non-existent city of Dunvegan — on the banks of the mighty Peace — and sold lots in Dunvegan all over the world. Some other promoters laid out a dummy Edson two miles from the real Edson and sold lots in that all over the world. The dummy Edson was in a swamp. All this excitement made nothing but work for Mac McQuarrie and his gang, as the settlers flocked through to the land of promise. Tough as the trail was, and tender as most of the travellers were, there was only one casualty — an American who tried to swim the Smoky River in the breakup. But there was a gain of one traveller. That was a little chap named Frank Turner, who was born en route — and is today, a farmer near Grande Prairie.

Yes, they had everything on the Edson Trail. They had justice too. There was only one mounted policeman in the entire Peace River Country — hard-working Sergeant Clay. To assist him in bringing justice to the Edson Trail, Sergeant Clay had an old Hudson's Bay Company Scotsman — Tom Kerr — named justice of the peace of Sturgeon Lake. Tom's sole function as justice of the peace was fining bootleggers 25 dollars, it being against the law to have the stuff in the Peace River Country. Sergeant Clay would bring them in and Tom Kerr would fine them 25 dollars. The sergeant told Tom he ought to give the culprits a talking-to, when he fined them. That was the custom. So Tom worked out a little speech which always followed the fine. He would shake his fist and say: "We don't need sons of — a-hum — like you in the country". And then he'd turn to Sergeant Clay and say: "How did I do?" And the mountie would assure him: "Tom, you upheld the dignity of the law". Once Tom fined a chap named Dan Baker 25 dollars for trying to run whiskey into the promised land. Afterwards, Tom and Sergeant Clay were breaking the bottles — as required by the law. They opened case after case of vile stuff which Tom considered fit only for destruction anyway. Then they came to the last case. It was not liquid poison. It was a real, genuine, bonded-in-the-bottle Johnny Dewar. Tom Kerr's old Scottish heart leaped for joy — and fell again in sadness. Then he faced Sergeant Clay: "Clay", he said, "p'lacement or no p'lacement ye're not goin' to break those." Clay said it would be legally wrong if they didn't. Tom said it would be morally wrong if they did. And what did they do? We'll leave it to you.

And as they argue we'll take our leave of the Edson Trail, as it was in 1910, and '11, and '12, and '13 and '14. In 1915, the railway punched into the Peace River Country, and the Edson Trail went back to the forest and to the mountain goats, and now is preserved only in stories — the kind of stories that Mac McQuarrie can tell.

Credit — Glenbow—Alberta Institute, Calgary, Alberta.



Hell Bent...for the 'Peace'

by Beatrice Clink

A piano stood by the boggy roadway at Mile 35 on the Edson Trail.

But no music sprang from its keys, warping now in the damp musty brush; no family pictures adorned the once polished top already swelling and checking under the constant drip of the wet northern forest.

Farther along a mower and a hay-rake barely pushed from the trail were half buried, as the piano was, in the cement-like mud which was everywhere.

And still farther along a dejected mother and her children huddled miserably under a tree on the driest spot they could find. A loaded farm wagon, oxen-drawn, and down to the hubs in the mud rested while a haggard man and two tired boys cut new logs to patch the corduroy road beyond their load. Even the milk cow, tied to the endgate of the wagon, slumped patiently, but disconsolately where it stood knee-deep in the mud.

This was the picture on the Edson Trail between the years 1910 and 1915. A heartbreaking struggle over a hacked-out bush trail: A seemingly endless fight with muskegs, steep, rocky hills, rivers, insects and always the mud; the discarding of the heavier deeply-cherished, and often needed possessions, so that the wagons could be hauled through.

But it was the trail over which hundreds of settlers who went into the Peace River country in those days triumphed. It was an adventure in adversity which gave those who went through it a satisfying sense of accomplishment, and molded them into a part of the world into which they had gone to live.

Small wonder the slogan of these early pioneers was, "Hell Bent for the Peace!"

In 1910 the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway reached Edson, 100 miles west of Edmonton. The settlers of Grande Prairie, disappointed that the railway did not strike north to their country, were clamouring for a road. The government sent one of its finest engineers to find the best route from Edson into this northern area.

In a straight line, the railroad was only 150 miles from Grande Prairie, but actually it was much farther, with so many rivers to cross and so much muskeg to struggle through. There was also an endless chain of steep backbreaking hills to climb before the settlers reached their coveted goal.

There was an old Indian trail, used by the Klondykers, which ran from Lac Ste Anne, through the bush and muskeg to the Indian post at Sturgeon Lake. From here a crude trail led to Grande Prairie. The practical thing was to link Edson with Sturgeon Lake.

After their survey, the engineers reported that at best it would be a "primitive road", but they did their best to make it passable with the time and means at their disposal. Work crews were sent in to corduroy the worst stretches and find the easiest grades down the steep hills. Bridges were built over the smaller creeks and ferries installed over the larger rivers.

In a few months, the road was pushed through to the Mission at Sturgeon Lake. It crossed the Athabasca, the Baptiste, the Little Smoky, and the Big Smoky rivers. It passed through a territory rich in furs and alive with moose, deer, and caribou.

From Sturgeon Lake the road turned west and followed the old trail from Lesser Slave Lake which crossed the Smoky River at Bezanson and went on into Grande Prairie. This part of the road lay through pleasant, easily traversed land.

When the road was finished, enterprising individuals soon built stopping places along the trail. They used log buildings. They cut hay in the meadows to sell to the weary travellers, who found frequent stops and days of rest necessary to their stock.

By 1911 the road was in fairly good condition and the rush was on. Thousands of settlers unloaded their effects at Edson and started on the long trek north.

The pioneers started out bravely, going north from the main street of the little frontier town of Edson. Soon they were surrounded by the dark, dripping forest. They encountered short stretches of muskeg, a foretaste of worse to come. For the first time many realized how puny is the strength of a man and two oxen when pitted against the sucking mud of a muskeg.

When they got stuck, there was nothing to do but unload and carry the goods, piece by piece, to the other side of the muskeg. Even with the wagon empty, it was often all the oxen could do to pull it out. It was discouraging work under the hot sun with the constant swarms of mosquitoes and bull flies. Raining, it was even more depressing, the mud stuck to everything like glue.

After 20 miles, the trail reached higher ground, until at Mile 35 it reached the peak of the range of hills south of the Athabasca River. To get to this point had meant long, hard climbs of one steep hill after another. To get their goods up the worst hills, the settlers had to unload and make two or three trips with partial loads or hitch two teams on one load, unhitch and go back for the other load.

The Athabasca River was reached at Mile 53. The descents to the river were steep and slippery. Many teams and loads skidded down the hill. The oxen slid, feet braced, the wagon-box pressing against their rumps.

Finally after weeks, the weary travellers plodded around a curve in the road and there sparkling in front of them lay Sturgeon Lake. Along the lake shore could be seen the many log shacks of the Indians and halfbreeds, the stores and hotels, and the Anglican and Roman Catholic missions. Civilization once more!

From here the road led west some 70 miles, but the country was more pleasant and not so low. Once the ferry over the Big Smoky was reached, settlers were practically in the "Promised Land."

Most of the heavy hauling into the district was done in the winter when the river was frozen and the trails good for sleighing. This was the time to lay in a stock of provisions or bring in heavy farm implements.

In time, the Grande Prairie and Peace River Transportation Company organized a stage service. It was planned to cover the round trip to the Big Smoky in two weeks. The first stage left Edson on April 17, 1911, and returned May 18. Soon it was running twice a week. Changes of horses were made at stopping-places along the way.

The hardships of the trail were often spurs to greater efforts on the part of the travellers and many times their ingenuity triumphed over what seemed like insurmountable obstacles. Mr. A. R. Smith, a pioneer of Beaverlodge, Alberta, tells of riding in as a young man over the Edson Trail in 1915. At one point on the trail, his horse went lame. He had to dismount and decide what to do. It was impossible to continue unless his horse had shoes. Along the road were the carcasses of many dead horses lost by settlers. Seeing one with shoes, he wondered how to get the shoes off without tools. He finally hit upon the plan of making a fire and burning the shoes off the dead horse. Then he transferred the coveted shoes to his crippled mount and proceeded on his way.

Often the trip from Edson to Grande Prairie took three months because of the frequent delays necessary to allow the animals to feed and rest up. It was a hard trip for men, and doubly hard for women, particularly if they had little children.

The Edson Trail was one of suffering, fortitude and heroism. It fell into disuse in 1916 when the E. D. and B.C. Railway arrived in the Grande Prairie country, but in spite of its short five years of life, it left its marks upon that country and its pioneers. Their proudest memories today are that they came in over the Edson Trail.

Reprinted from Farm and Ranch Review, May, 1958

Novel Sights in Great Edmonton Hinterland

Best Way to Travel through Northland is on Horseback – Settlers Find it Hard to Make their Way In Heavily Loaded with Supplies

Paul Lambert, who on a recent trip through the Peace River country, was specially commissioned to write articles for the Journal, has brought with him many interesting photographs of his trip, four of which are here reproduced.

Mr. Lambert always makes his trips up north via Edson and the Grande Prairie country. Along the route there are several stopping places all of which are known to the prairie traveller.

After leaving Edson the travellers go for 20 miles before the first stop is made. A few houses and a bunkhouse form this part of the trail and it is called the Frenchman's. Fifteen miles further the Scotchman is reached, where a bunkhouse is under construction and will be in readiness for use in a few days. After leaving the Scotchman, 20 miles have to be covered before another stop can be made. The Athabasca is that place, where the travellers alight for another rest. The Athabasca boasts of several large barns having accommodation for 60 teams. There is a store there and a lunch room. There is a small supply of hay at this stopping place, but more has been ordered and is expected in a few days.

After spending the night at The Athabasca, the travellers continue their journey to Little Smoky, which is 26 miles farther north. There is a small house at this

place, while other ones are under construction. Twelve miles further there is Tony River, where a stopping place is being built. A distance of 38 miles has to be covered before the next stopping place is reached. This is called House River, where there is also a place to stop overnight. There is a large bunkhouse and the barns contain 300 tons of hay. The same distance has to be traversed before Scotty is reached. Scotty is on the Sturgeon Lake, and is the largest stopping place en route. They have 500 tons of hay in store and accommodation for 80 teams. At Hunting, which is 15 miles further, several large barns are under construction and in time 60 teams will be able to be accommodated. Goodwin Brothers have a bunkhouse 25 miles from Hunting and 500 tons of hay in store. Caleo is the next stop and it is eight miles from Goodwin. At Grande Prairie city the travellers are welcomed by several homesteaders. Promise has been given for a large supply of provisions for this city before the winter months arrive. The next stopping place is that of Bear Lake, which is 12 miles west of Grande Prairie city.

Reprinted from The Edmonton Journal, October 7, 1911

Credit – Glenbow – Alberta Institute, Calgary, Alberta.

THE MARCH OF TIME IN THE PEACE RIVER COUNTRY

by Dave Williamson

During nearly half a century of living in the Peace River country in Alberta one has seen great changes take place. The way of life we knew in the Edson Trail era has given way to a manner of living filled with conveniences and comparative comfort for the average person.

True, some of the newer settlements are not quite so fortunate at this time. However, this state of affairs is being gradually rectified with the construction of good roads, telephones and power lines.

One of the greatest changes evident is in the realm of transportation. It is a far cry from the yokes of slow-moving oxen and the teams of horses that inched their difficult way, hauling the covered wagons or sleighs of the settlers over the corduroy patches and myriad mudholes, ruts and swamps, of the Grouard, and Edson Trails to present day cars and highways.

Gone is the cry of the bullwhacker as he swung his whip at the rumps of his tardy oxen in order to spur them to greater efforts in difficult spots. Gone, too, is the wailing of the steel-shod sleigh runners as they grudgingly slid over the dry snow of the winter tracks, in frigid weather. The advent of a chinook was greeted with smiles as the warm, southing wind took the dryness out of the snow and allowed the sleighs to slide freely over the trail.

The long trains of packhorses that used to amble over the old trails have now disappeared. Few present-day people are aware that several early Peace River pioneers — lacking the price of a team and wagon — shouldered a packsack and walked the 250 weary miles to Grande Prairie.

The huge log barns and spacious bunkhouses of the privately-owned stopping-places were spaced about a day's journey apart along the Edson Trail — generally near a creek or river to assure a supply of water.

There were some dangerous sections on the trail. Break-neck Hill was one of these spots. Here, the trail skirted a deep canyon. An ox-team hauling a wagon had gone over the abyss and broken their necks — hence the name.

Time marched on . . . In the year 1937 a survey was made for a highway between the lumber town of Whitecourt, 123 miles northwest of Edmonton, and

Valleyview, 106 miles farther on toward Grande Prairie. The survey closely followed the general route of the Edson Trail for much of the distance.

In 1950, giant machines were put to work along the survey line, slashing the right-of-way for a modern highway. By 1955, the grade had been completed. By 1960, black-topping had transformed the former earth grade into a wide, modern paved highway — one of the best in the province.

Before the steel of the Edmonton - Dunvegan and B.C. railroad had reached the then village of Grande Prairie, settlers going into the Peace River country travelled over the old trail by Lesser Slave Lake or the Edson Trail. Those going via Edson shipped their stock and goods by rail from Edmonton to Edson. There, oxen or horses were used for the overland journey.

The trip from Edson to Grande Prairie, by team, took anywhere from two to six weeks — depending on conditions. In summer, the trail became almost impassable at times.

The teamsters who drove their outfits over the old trail were a hardy lot, not given to despair. Radio was unknown in those days. If they wished entertainment on the trail, they amused themselves by singing frontier ballads or playing a mouth-organ, stopping occasionally to shout encouragement to their animals as they plodded along.

Contrast this type of travel with modern day transportation. Now . . . the cars and trucks leave Edmonton and skim smoothly over the broad asphalt highway that stretches past Grande Prairie to Fort St. John in British Columbia, joining the Alaska Highway at Dawson Creek before doing so.

Let the reader gain the impression that the teamster was an individual who indulged in everlasting song, it might be well to admit that teamsters had their bad moments: a broken wagon axle, an overturned caboose, or a wagon stuck fast in some mudhole, was hardly conducive to singing, but rather was cause for a string of ear-scorching epithets, not suitable for printing.

A tough country and a tough trail made tough men. The Edson Trail was no place for the meek or the weak. Instinctual fortitude was the key needed to open the vast Peace River frontier.

Change begetting change, the motorized traveller of today has no need of the barns and bunkhouses used by

his “oxenized” counterpart of the old days who paid money to use them. The provincial government has established inviting and convenient campsites along Highway 43, about 35 miles apart. Each site has a neat and spacious kitchen built of planks shaped to resemble logs, for exterior finish, and well varnished. Roofs are of green, asphalt shingles. Interior walls are painted white. A stove and plenty of firewood is supplied as well as tables and benches. All free.

The campsite at House River, 22 miles south of Valleyview, on Highway 43, is beautifully located and has been greatly improved. Almost at the back door of the kitchen, the shallow waters of the river flow by in rippling, murmuring cadence over its rocky bed, hastening to meet the Little Smoky River, nearby, to begin the long, torturous journey down the great Mackenzie river system in a joint flight to the vast Arctic Seas.

A short distance to the southwest of this campsite is the spot where the Edson Trail crossed House River. The old road is hardly discernible now, the poplars are taking over. The road-building pride of 1912 is known to few of the motorists using the present modern highway. The road distance that an ox team could cover in a day, under good conditions, was about 20 miles or less on the old trail. Compare this with the present-day car speeds and one must agree that great changes in transportation have indeed taken place.

The old spruce and balm of gilead trees that border

the House River campsite offer shade from the sun for today’s automobile campers, just as nearby trees provided shade for the pioneers of the Edson Trail era. If trees could talk, what a story these could tell — a story of a slender stream of humanity fighting its way slowly northward to settle the vast new Peace country. A story replete with famous characters such as Six-gun-toting Nobby Clark who drove herds of cattle over the old trail — a fearless man, who had proved himself on the battlefields of France in 1914, and who still lives near Grande Prairie.

Or, perhaps — if given the power of speech — the lofty spruces could go on to tell of the exploits of the Royal North West Mounted Police who brought law and order to the Peace, under the direction of gallant officers such as Inspectors West and Anderson of the force and their famous fellow officer Sergeant Clay.

The Church too, had its pioneers of the old trails. Though they have laid down their earthly burdens years ago, the memories of living pioneers are replete with the tales of such famous, early missionaries as Bishop Grouard of the Catholic faith, Bishop Bompas of the Anglican Church, and the Reverend Alexander Forbes who toiled in the cause of the Presbyterian faith.

Reprinted from The Western Producer, November 22, 1962

Credit — Glenbow—Alberta Institute, Calgary, Alberta.

Eighteen months ago a large deputation went from Edson to appeal to the Provincial Government at Edmonton for various matters which it was felt the town and district greatly needed. The deputation was received with kindness to say the least. Premier Sifton and the Ministers in charge of Departments heard with apparent interest what the deputation had to say and though as is the way with governments they sent the deputation away with speeches which promised nothing definite, but rather dwelt on the many other things the government had to do, it becomes increasingly clear that the claims of the district have not been altogether lost sight of.

Two of the matters for which the deputation asked were a road from Edson to Marlboro and one from Edson to Shining Bank. These two roads are being made by the government this year. In fact, a good deal of work has already been done towards them and by the fall it will be possible to drive over passable roads which will follow the shortest feasible routes between Edson and both the other important points indicated.

But in the case of Shining Bank at any rate that is, in our opinion, not sufficient to meet the case though it is a great advance on the conditions which have prevailed up to now. Having a road we must set our minds on a railway down the McLeod Valley.

The district known by the name of Shining Bank lies on the left bank of the McLeod River and extends well up the slope of the hills which stand between the McLeod and the Athabasca. No one has ever been found to dispute the excellence of the district as an agricultural area. The clearing to be done is light and the soil excellent. The route of the Grand Trunk Pacific for a branch from Edson to Grande Prairie was by this district keeping along the left bank of the McLeod until the valley of the Athabasca was reached, where the line was to bend westwards up the Athabasca Valley and so on to Grande Prairie. The line would thus have tapped a district on its way which should have given a paying piece of railway from the outset. The Edson to Grande Prairie Branch is not a dead issue though it is dormant at present.

Whether the branch to Grande Prairie is gone on with soon or not, however, the line as far as Shining Bank is urgent. It is true there is a wagon road from that district to Peers. But when one gets to Peers he is nowhere in particular. There is a railway station at Peers and a store or two. The same is true of Rosevear. But there is no market for produce at either place. If this were a wheat district no more need to be days, for at the railway there would be a point for delivering wheat and the market is distant in any event. The people of the Shining Bank district gave their preference to Peers and Rosevear as stations to which they would like roads but as they find themselves with surplus produce for sale their eyes will turn more towards Edson. A wagon road is good so far as it goes but a railway will be needed sooner or later and the sooner it comes the better.

If such a railway is to be part of a line to Grande Prairie it will, of course, be of the usual type of grade and steel. But if that is to be long delayed a light railway with electricity for power is a feasible scheme. Such a railway could be made with a minimum of cost for grading and the McLeod River will supply all the power needed; an auxiliary plant for the use of coal being assumed for temporary occasions. It is a question whether a light railway might not with advantage be constructed even if the Grand Trunk line to the Prairie is also constructed. The latter line is intended to keep to the left bank of the McLeod. But on the right bank is some of the finest land in this or any other district with natural grass growing thick and high. For that district Whitecourt, the intended divisional point on the intended CNR railway from Edmonton to Grande Prairie, will be a serious rival of Edson. In fact, Whitecourt may be regarded as the only serious rival of Edson as a town in this western area for Tollerton is not a rival. Edson and Tollerton are one and Edson has the advantage over Whitecourt of being on a transcontinental railway. But a light railway between Edson and Whitecourt would be of advantage to both towns and its connecting two centres would make it a paying proposition such as a line ending in the fields could not be. That Edson would reap more advantage than Whitecourt need not make Whitecourt jealous for that place would also receive benefit. The line itself would so open up a rich district that both places would grow and the country between would gain immeasurably.

We do not suggest that such a railway should be built to assist settlement though no one would deny that it would have that effect if built at once. But the settlement is taking place all the time and is likely to do so without the railway. The time it would take to build the line would see settlement fairly complete. It will take still more time, however, to bring the project into practical contemplation before the actual work can ever begin. In that period not only will every quarter be taken up but the land will have become productive of something demanding transportation. If the idea can take tangible shape the settlers to whom it will be useful can do much to help it forward. Under the recent Statute authorizing government guarantee of \$7,000 a mile it would not be beyond the settlers in the district to produce a scheme which would bring in all the outside capital needed to obtain this undoubted boom to the district.

Reprinted from The Western Leader, May 29, 1915

STUFF IS SELLING AT PROHIBITIVE PRICES

GRANDE PRAIRIE COUNTRY IS NOT SUFFICIENTLY PRO- VISIONED FOR WINTER

INTENDING PROSPECTORS SHOULD TAKE IN AT LEAST THREE WEEKS' SUPPLY

Edmonton, Sept. 28. Settlers in Grande Prairie are facing a serious shortage of food supply, and instructions are being sent out from immigration department in this section of Alberta to warn intending travellers to Grande Prairie that it will be practically impossible for them to purchase supplies at their destination.

A communication was received from Winnipeg immigration offices by W. J. Webster, Edmonton immigration agent, this morning enclosing a letter from the mounted police stationed on Grande Prairie setting forth conditions there. Although the communication from the police is dated August 14, and has reached the immigration authorities here by a circuitous route, later reports from Grande Prairie confirm its statements. The letter is as follows:

Royal Northwest Mounted Police,
Grande Prairie, Aug. 14, 1911.

Officer Commanding

R. N. W. Police,
Lesser Slave Lake.

Sir. Re supply of provisions at Grande Prairie, I have the honor to state for your information that the supply of provisions for sale in Grande Prairie is practically exhausted, and there is very little chance of getting this supply replenished until December or January next.

I would therefore suggest that intending travellers into this country be notified at Edson and Peace River Crossing of this, and that they be cautioned not to proceed on the journey here unless they have at least three weeks' supplies with them.

At Sturgeon Lake there is a very limited supply of flour and bacon.

As settlers are coming here daily from Edson, most of them without supplies, I ask you to notify that place by wire of the shortage of provisions on Grande Prairie.

I have the honor to be Sir,

Your obedient servant,

S. G. Clay (Corporal).

Credit — Glenbow—Alberta Institute, Calgary, Alberta.

SETTLERS FACE FOOD SHORTAGE

Reports Conflicting

This seems to conflict with the reports that have been received from time to time throughout the summer as to the condition of the road from Edson to Grande Prairie. Everyone who reported the road as favorable for travel, however, added a warning against overloading, and settlers who have followed the Edson trail evidently have gone in with few more provisions than would be required along the road, counting on purchasing more supplies at the trading posts situated at different points on the prairie. On reaching their destination, they found that the price asked for supplies was almost prohibitive, but in many cases it was necessary even under these conditions to buy to avoid suffering, and those who had the money to pay did so, with the result that even the supply of staples at the trading posts has been depleted in an alarming manner.

According to Lewis Raby, who, accompanied by Edward Ensel, has spent the past month in the north country, returning to Edmonton yesterday, there is no particular reason for alarm for the settlers on the prairie. To the Capital this morning he pointed out that while flour and bacon are at a premium, meat is plentiful, and most of the settlers have vegetables in their own gardens.

Plenty of Cattle

"On the ranches in Grande Prairie there are fully 500 head of cattle ready for slaughter", said Mr. Raby. "Revillon brothers have a large herd of beef cattle, as have also Mead and Grant and Lewis Adair, ranchers in the Grande Prairie country. Game is plentiful also, and so there should be no lack of fresh meat."

Mr. Raby is of the opinion that Grande Prairie's logical source of supply of flour is the mills at Peace River Crossing. Two flour mills are now in operation there. The wheat crop in the valley of the Peace is good this year, and soon there will be flour from this year's crop for shipment all over the north. Supplies can be transported from Peace River Crossing to Grande Prairie much more economically than they can be taken in by way of Edson.

Reprinted from The Albertan, September 29, 1911

Ken Liddell's column

D-13

GRANDE PRAIRIE — They say the Edson Trail today is nothing but a coyote run — not that it ever was much more — and its tribulations and hardships live only in memories of those who jogged over it and who have seen the Peace River country grow.

They are still young people by today's standards, and the stretch of land some outsiders are given to describing as "great" although "patient" would be a better word, is still young, too, with millions of its acres still to be settled.

TODAY SETTLEMENT USUALLY follows the means of getting there. Not always, but as a rule. But when the Peace River settlement began about 1912, the people found their own way into the northwest pocket of Alberta that is part timber and part prairie.

There were three means of entry. One was a packtrail over the Swan Hills, a trail stamped out by those who tried to reach the Klondike by that way in 1898. A second was from Edmonton via Athabasca and the Lesser Slave Lake Trail to Dunvegan and Peace River. This trail was followed on lake and river ice in winter, over land and portage in summer.

Another was the Edson Trail. It snaked its way from Edson, the railway divisional point between Edmonton and Jasper, to Grande Prairie.

THE Edson Trail was built, if that is the word, by the Alberta government in 1911. Some say no engineer ever went over it. It took off through timber, over muskeg on which poplar and spruce poles were laid, and up and down hills two miles in length. Along it were stopping places — perhaps a bunkhouse and barn of logs — that took their names from the miles from Edson . . . 20 Mile, 35 Mile, 47 Mile stop and so on.

Between the stopping places the settlers battled cold in winter, although the trail was then in best shape, and in summer the black flies and mosquitoes.

PEOPLE ANXIOUS TO obtain a stake in their country — a part of the country the Klondike-bound men made known for its agricultural possibilities — moved their cattle over the trail. They'd stop when the cow called to be milked.

A stage coach ran over it and John Lowe, who left Calgary in 1911 for Saskatoon Lake country near Wembley, drove one of them. He remembered the five drivers took eight days to cover the 260 miles from Edson to Grande Prairie. The stage carried four passengers, had a box at the back for the mail. The registered mail was kept under the footboard where, Lowe recalled, a bottle of rum was also kept in case a

passenger got sick. Usually the driver used the rum to keep warm. The fare from Edson to Grande Prairie was \$25.

IN wet times the corduroy over the muskeg would float. It was not a bottomless muskeg, but a cow would sink belly deep. Driving over the corduroy was like driving over an endless grating. Some of the corduroy was loose and some was set on stringers with wooden pegs.

In summer, when caught between stopping places, the travellers cooked over camp fires. In winter — when every effort was made to reach a stopping place at noon and night — there was comfort in a caboose with a four-hole cook stove.

The trail was in use from 1912 to 1916 when the railroad reached Grande Prairie. The railway improved things tremendously. Before it arrived mail came over the Edson Trail once a week. The railway brought it — and people — twice a week, and eventually daily.

THE FIRST POSTMASTER in Grande Prairie was Jack O. Patterson, who reached the area — via Lesser Slave Lake Trail — when he was 22. The usual order was reversed in his case. He was followed by his father, Alpheus Patterson, who became a member of Parliament for the area in 1913 and who did a lot to get purebred stock into the country.

Jack Patterson opened the Grande Prairie post office in a caboose in which he had journeyed into the country. A fellow on his way from Saskatoon Lake to Twin Lakes passed that way, yelled "here's your post office" and threw off the date stamp, \$50 worth of postal notes and \$10 worth of stamps.

Patterson, who helped build some of the first buildings at Grande Prairie, has seen it grow into a city of 7,000 but he says the whole area "still is a young man's country".

HE had a funny story to tell about travel, too. Now a fellow can fly to Edmonton on commercial aircraft so fast he has barely time to get acquainted with his seatmate. Mr. Patterson was making the flight one day, studying the vast sea of timber and the pockets of prairie, and he mentioned to the stewardess that when he first made the trip it took 30 days to get from Edmonton.

"Goodness", said the stewardess, "whatever were you doing?"

Reprinted from The Calgary Herald, August 29, 1958.

Credit — Glenbow—Alberta Institute, Calgary, Alberta.

Edson Leader, Feb 10, 1971

DECEMBER, 1910

Anticipating the wagon trail into the Grande Prairie country will be heavily used next spring, the provincial government is encouraging construction of stopping houses along the route.

The new trail strikes northward from Edson as well as from Medicine Lodge, 25 miles beyond Edson. A provincial spokesman says stopping houses will be required every 30 miles along the trail.

Thirty miles is considered a good day's journey for settlers, whose wagons are loaded with all their property in farming requisites and household goods. The official concludes with this hint: "For settlers who intend to become citizens of the north, catering to the needs of these newcomers will provide a profitable undertaking."

FEBRUARY, 1911

Almost all the travellers prefer the Lesser Slave Lake Trail. The new Medicine Lodge route is not considered fit to travel. However, some fear a hay shortage along the Slave Lake Trail later in the winter.

MARCH, 1911

A letter from a Beaver lodge homesteader assails the provincial government's new "short cut" to the Peace River Country from Medicine Lodge, 25 miles west of Edson.

"I found the trail in the crudest possible condition . . . stumps three feet high . . . hills that could be negotiated only with a pack horse." He had with him farm implements and supplies for a year. He managed to reach the Athabasca River with his load, but had to leave it there, continuing by horse and rig. Beyond the Athabasca, the trail was equally bad or even worse. Left camped at the Athabasca, he notes, was a family which had exhausted its supply of hay — and which was awaiting the birth of an infant."

Taken from *The Edmonton Journal*, "50 Years Ago":

M. Ahlf

Reprinted from The Edson Leader, February 10, 1971.



Date Due

EDUC	FL 3 '77	OCT 15	RETURN
FEB 3	RETURN	DEC 10	'81
EDUC	JL 25 '77	DEC 03	1991 RETURN
OCT 7	RETURN		
DUE Educ	AUG 10 '78		
RETURNED	AUG 3 '78		
EDUC	OCT 12 '82		
RETURN	OCT 6 '82		
DUE EDUC	OCT 18 '83		
OCT 17	RETURN		
DUE EDUC	NOV 11 '84		
DUE	NOV 09 RETURN		
EDUC	NOV 05 '88		
DUE	NOV 05 '88		
EDUC	NOV 05 '88		
NOV 07	RETURN		
DUE	JUN 28 '90		
EDUC	JUN 15 RETURN		
DUE	SEP 1 '90		
EDUC			

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